PETER KNOWS WHAT DICK LIKES

JONATHAN
MEADES
AUTHOR OF *FILTHY ENGLISH*

FIRST PUBLICATION
INCLUDES THE SCREENPLAY
'MILLIE'S PROBLEM'

PALADIN

Jonathan Meades was born in Salisbury, Wiltshire and educated in the West of England and Bordeaux. He later went to RADA. He is the author of two books of non-fiction and of a collection of stories, *Filthy English*. He has written and presented several television shows and has worked for numerous papers and magazines. His novel *Pompey* will be published by Grafton Books next year.

JONATHAN MEADES

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For Holly and Rose and Lily

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Peter Knows What Dick Likes

Introduction

'What you bin getting up to then my lovely all this while? How you bin keepin yourself outa trouble sunshine?' You approach middle age and it approaches you. It looks like a rozzer and his dog. You're going to get asked those questions (with the usual unfailing courtesy). You look guilty. You're on the pavement heading straight at them and beside the pavement's a three lane each way race track that you can't cross and if you turn round – well, they'll get your number then: even if PC ('Sir') doesn't sniff your paranoia Psycho-Rover will. No escape. You approach it cursing, trepidatious, feeling the venial mutate into the heinous, wishing you were dressed less like a swell, less like a slob, less like a clerk (sartorial dissemblance never fooled anyone let alone the Bill). You can never get these things quite right. You have to have an answer ready – you know what you're going to get asked. Then, with luck, the bastard won't charge you with insulting behaviour, won't give you to the bow wow for a snack, won't bang you up and experiment with his nightstick and your skull . . . This is my answer, this is a bit of what I've been up to – it doesn't do to be too literal. Like any answer that's going to stand up it's shaped, partial, simplified, cut and tucked. The stuff that follows, offered with no particular humility, satisfies two criteria. 1) I can bear to reread it, unembarrassed, with enjoyment even – though with occasional regret too: I wonder what happened to that clever little fellow. 2) It's not too dependent on topicality – in other words I've dumped anything that would have required me to append explanatory footnotes – this out of torpor rather than an antipathy to footnotes. Every piece here is here in the form in which I wrote it, the form it was in before it was got at by this sub or

that editor. The ideal editor is of course oneself. The next best those who are too idle or drunk even to bother to read the stuff. The worst are the vain and self-deceiving dorks who somehow manage to ascribe authorship to themselves and wade in with the coercive first person plural – 'We ought to be more explicit about . . .' No *I* damned well ought not: indeed, one thing I shall not be explicit about is their identities. Call it tact if you will, I call it cowardice.

The earliest work here is fiction. The stories *Could This Be Greatness?* and *Perfect Portrait* were written in 1970–71, soon after I had left drama school not knowing what to do but knowing for certain that acting or, rather, the life of the actor (which involves little but other actors) was not going to be it. *Perfect Portrait* is a topographically accurate rendition of Bordeaux in and around which city I spent much of my late teens when I wasn't at RADA, the Sandhurst of Gower Street. (While my friends in France and at Oxford and at London art schools spent their student years throwing paving stones at the CRS or headbutting the hooves of gallant police horses or lying on the floor under the influence of massive doses of LSD watching the ceiling bubble and etna I was being martially drilled into chorus-boyhood.) The gastronomy in *Perfect Portrait* (the only gastronomy in this book) is, however, dicey: in those days I knew little of grand restaurant cooking, and, besides, Bordeaux was not a place to discover it. *Could This Be Greatness?* doubtless owes whatever qualities it possesses to the fact that I wrote it in two days whilst suffering a fever contracted in Morocco. The film *Millie's Problem* is, if you like, the missing story from *Filthy English*; that collection includes one piece, *The Hoody Brute*, which was initially conceived as a film. *Millie's Problem* (1985) was conceived as a prose narrative but abandoned when it became clear that the doubling could only work if actually *seen*: the screenplay was commissioned by Channel 4 and rejected on the bizarre grounds that it was 'too harrowing' for a 'genre' slot. They knew what they were getting.

There are other pieces of fiction here but they're not announced as such. Some of the journalism – essays, reportage, reviews, squibs, portraits etc – was written between 1971

and 1975; most of it is of '81 to '88. Early on I was green as copper, happy to be published, grateful to be ill-paid, tirelessly productive. The publishers of the two magazines to which I most eagerly contributed have both achieved subsequent ill fame. Philip Dossé (Leonard Rossiter) turned up in a telly play by one of his former employees about a man who runs an eternally shoddy stable of magazines, deflects his creditors by manning the switchboard in order to apologize for the boss's absence, and rarely pays anyone. *Books and Bookmen* was the magazine Dossé took greatest pride in, and he'd occasionally send his contributors fulsome and protracted notes of praise – this very likely compensated the green youth for the meagreness or absence of the cheque. Gerald Kingsland (Oliver Reed) was the man who advertised for a wife to accompany him to a Pacific island and got more than he bargained for in Lucy Irving: the film and book *Castaway* (haven't seen it, haven't read it) tell the story. In the early 70s he owned a 'sex education' magazine called *Curious*; it was run in insanitary premises on Wardour Street. From its noisome back-room a comedy duo called Melvin and Charlie dispatched mail-order dildoes. The sex bit of the magazine obviously took care of itself. The education bit was more of a problem. Kingsland, a ginger moustached ogre with a worrying temper, an incomprehensible west country accent and a naïve trust in accountants, instructed his editor (a subsequent agony uncle) to publish respectable articles. The gig fell to me: I was a friend of the art director and could read and write. I could also plagiarize from French: if Barthes's *Mythologies* was available in English at that time it was not much known – it was a safe enough springboard for an article on wrestling, a subject in which I had no interest other than as just that, a subject. There's quite a bit of that here. I don't mean plagiarism (which, in the young, is usually dignified in Stevenson's neat formula as 'playing the sedulous ape'), I mean the process by which one is drawn towards a previously unknown, unacknowledged milieu solely in order to write about it. No, I don't want to join the army; I don't want to become a transsexual or necessarily to copulate with one; I'm no more preoccupied with window dressing than the next guy. And so on. Curiosity,

disinterest and the consequent capacity to approach things non-*parti pris* strike me as useful attributes. But they're by no means essential. Journalism, like any other ism, like any other system of surveying the world, is factional and engaged in a perpetual civil war which I do my best to conchie out of. Newspapers and magazines are there for the writer to use, not to allow himself to be used by. The drear consensus of 'news values', the primacy of politics and public life, the formulaic division of 'hard' and 'soft' topics – these are the inventions of commonplace creatures and are to be resisted with resourceful bloody-mindedness. So too are: functional prose (which of course serves but the basest of functions); the confusion of fact with truth (which is fluid, infinite, and on no account to be prefixed by the definite article); the wretched conviction that exoticism starts a thousand miles away. Nothing could be wider of the mark: exoticism begins at home, it lurks all about us. You need only cock your head one degree from its norm to sniff the foetid richness and glimpse the hair beneath the clothes. Cocking my head, that's what I've been up to, mostly, Sir.

Peter Knows What Dick Likes: Les Pipes du Bois

Peter knows what Dick likes. Dick knows what Peter likes.

The idea that oral-genital contact is much much more fun when made between chums of the same sex is commonplace. It's gay lore, fag swank, it's a misogynistic chide and a heterophobic deprecation. Boys do it better. It's a wrong idea: I *know* there are these girls who can do *such turns* that . . . oh, but this is a different tale, one for another time. It's a wrong idea, but the proselytizing has worked. The straight world has swallowed it, and men resent *them* and women fear *them*. Boys do it better – it's part of the currency, it's as simple as that. The potency of a received idea has little to do with its approximation to any kind of truth; rather, it moves towards a state of certitude in the collective conscious (a dumb brute, muzzle it) in a quasi-geometric progression. The more it's uttered the more plausible it gets. It gets to be fact in the end. Here's one in the crutch for the idea: the assumption that boys do it better (merely because they know what they like) is akin to the assumption that the thwarted suicide dragged from a river will, in his turn, be a plucky life-saver. Likely as not he'll stand on the frosty bridge shrugging as the bundle of laundry disappears below him. This doesn't really help me. The only solace can be to just look at the people who subscribe to the idea, just look. Just look at them in Paris. In parts of that city they've put the girls out of business by their subscription to the idea. The idea made flesh – *made* means: built, moulded, inflated, chemically and physically contrived, cut and tucked, depilated, ornamentally mutilated – the idea made flesh is a sex change who has gone on the game (they do tend to) or a partial sex change (hormones, yet to feel the knife) who may be saving to get to Casablanca (where the knives are). They

aren't all Brazilians, they were all born boys, they were all born in societies contaminated by machismo, they all know about the gift of head, don't they. Boy's nous, woman's body – it's a winsome mix for the sexual market place. They're *product*, partly self-built, often jerry-built, always self-determined. Their bodies are, of course, cartoons of women. But this is apt, mercantile sex is a cartoon of the real thing; the commerce is fiscal, masturbatory – it obviates the elemental wooing and desperate illusion of mutual attraction that precede even the tawdriest one night stand. With their stereotypical uniformity and confusion of gender they have made themselves a prostitute *caste*. There are analogies. There are eunuchs and castrati and hijira. They also are sexually, generatively deformed to an end. Here though the end itself is sexual. However did they get to be this way? Burou's nameplate at Av. Hassan II,71, Casablanca (26 09 96 and 26 05 66) lists his former posts: Ex Interne des Hôpitaux d'Alger; Ex Chef de Clinique Obstétricale d'Alger; Ex Accoucheur de la Maternité d'Oran. At the bottom of the tablet are inscribed: Accouchements Gynécologique and Chirurgie Gynécologique. It doesn't say anything about vagino-plasty, about severing an organ and building a box in its place. It is half past nine at night and through the glass door there's a boy with shoulders perfectly round like fruit shining the floor with mop soap. No, he says, I cannot see Dr Burou. I tap again and this time he disappears into the concierge's lair and fetches a personable gimp who tells me I'll have to go to the clinic in the street behind. When you turn off the boulevard (which is all consulates and notaries and doctors and 1930s Franco/Moorish municipal swagger) you are in a maze of white canyons. There are dustbins everywhere. There are men sitting asleep between the dustbins. There are skeletal dogs trying to tip over the dustbins; they need help. A nurse comes to the door of the clinic and listens with incredulity and affront to what I have to say; then a young woman doctor arrives and says calmly, yes, tomorrow at 10 A.M. She walks away up the stairs from the vestibule: these are the last stairs that George Jamieson walked up, the last stairs that James Morris walked up. How different did the vestibule look when they came back

down? Does the confusion of inter-sex extend to the most elemental perceptions? I stepped out into the street full of dustbins. I thought: There are rigs in them, there are scraps of tackle, *pines* and *valseuses*, shreds of testis that were cut but not tucked. These dustbins are the graves of corporeal embarrassments, of the wrong parts, of all that might make life, of all that made life so bad, made it *such a torture*. These were the parts that shouldn't have been there to begin with, that never corresponded with the brain that ran the body they were attached to. Are they really in these dustbins? Look for seepage, blood, tissue, red swabs browning with desiccation. Kick down a bin. Watch it all fall out: the carcasses of fowl, food cans, a broken sandal steeped in reeking sauce, eggshells, something like a sponge that oozes ordure, the shirt that covered the beggar that fed the lice, napkins, cardboard, brown paper greased to kill, rags that unfurl like hideous animals waking, the unspeakable things the rags covered. But not those things. I don't see the gear. They have their ways. They have incinerators, they must have. You have two lives and you have two deaths to match. There is no cheating. *Ils peuvent toujours prendre le pied?* That is the first question to ask Georges Burou, Clinique du Parc, Rue du Capitaine de Frégate Laparie (a sailor).

I was put in a waiting room with a dozen affluently Europeanized Moroccan women. (They must all have come from the suburbs of Ain Diab and Hay El Hana where the cubistic white villas are fortified with thick walls and grills and serious metal gates against the vagabond scum from the *bidonvilles*.) The only good thing on the wall was a print of an architectural fantasy representing three putti with compasses, rulers etc round a new (C17) house. I was moved to another room, patently unlived-in, all Directoire gilt and unread sets (of Tolstoi, Joseph Kessel, Proust, Gide, Mme de Sévigné etc). An elegant woman of about 40, French or pied noir, with a Parisian accent and a tight chignon opened the door of a study and gestured me to enter. Dr Burou, she said, has instructed me to say that he will not see you; he has never given an interview. You are the first writer to get this far, into his study.

His study: It is lined with shelves of medical journals and treatises – *Les Explorations Fonctionelles Gynécologiques, Les Cardiopathies Vulvulaires, L'Anesthésie et L'Analgésique Peridurales, Génétique Humaine.* There are photographs. Burou's looks and sartorial manner are those of a hard-living, hedonistic, ageing film actor – one who has got hip late in life. He holds a (grand?) child while his long mane of grey hair is windswept behind him. In another shot he wears a big black fur coat and a stetson with a snakeskin band; clinging to his arm is a woman of about 30, blonde by will (of course the hair of the women in this man's life is chromatically *chosen*). *Has the doctor any children?* No reply. *Children?* You're interviewing me. *You can tell me to get out.* Two children. *Sons?* No reply. *Sons?* No reply. *How long is he going to continue operating (according to French medical records he is now 70 years old)?* He hardly does any operations now. *That's not what I heard; why has he stopped?* He wanted to. *What about the other doctors here?* There are no other doctors. *You?* I'm his assistant. *Has he sons?* One son, one daughter. *Has he stopped operating because of the notoriety he attracted?* Has he (attracted notoriety)? He just wanted to stop. *Does it concern him that many of his patients have the operation in order to lead a life of prostitution?* Hein. *Does it concern him that many have paid for their operations by prostitution?* I have an appointment.

So I still don't know if Burou has had sex with any of his creations, how (or whether) he determines the patient's need for the operation, whether there are people whom he regrets having operated on, whether he believes that there is a fundamental link between sex changes and exhibitionistic prostitution, what he would think if his son wanted a sex change, whether he believes that surgical technology has created a demand for an operation that is *not* necessarily corrective but can be merely cosmetic and commercially exploitable.

Western Paris has a tradition of freakshows. Near Porte Maillot, where now there are air terminals and hotels and conference centres, stood Luna Parc. At night there was music, there were lights like cheap jewellery, there were booths

where human anomalies were displayed. Some may have displayed themselves – if you have reptilian skin or are a living skeleton or suffer adiposis dolorosa or are joined to your twin or have a phalliform clitoris or three breasts or three legs like Frank Lentini or if the legs of your unborn brother stick out from your groin and you can also eat fire or if coarse hair covers every bit of your body then you may have to display yourself to stay alive. The creatures who are brought to life in your lights at night in the Bois de Boulogne are no less disturbing than their teratological precursors. They are just as much the stuff of dream, just as liable to make us wonder about our essence, just as liable to cause our ideas of self to pitch out of the ring. As you cruise the avenues fantastical tableaux are revealed between the trees: how can bodies thus entwine themselves? How can heels like that support a body like that? They're seven inches and they make it almost seven feet. Lots of fake leopards have given their lives to clothe these brawny doxies, and lots of rubber trees their sap, and lots of cows their hides; no one wears much but it does add up, there are getting on for two hundred of them. They are sartorially both extravagant and unimaginative, there is not much variation, there is scant divergence from the norms of tiny skirt, tight corset, torn stockings (this is outdoors work). As I said, their bodies are cartoons of women; specifically they recall the dominatrices of S&M magazines. Such magazines are notable for a reliance on *drawings*, as if natural women lack the bodily stature to fulfil the fantasy. The creatures in the Bois are big, they are also strong. They wrested the territory from the girls who used to work it with straightforward intimidation. That was in the mid-70s; since then there have been periodic clean-ups by the officers of the first police district which includes the 16eme arrondissement bordering the Bois. They have not been markedly successful; indeed their main effect has been to disperse those who formerly worked exclusively in the Bois to other red light areas, making parts of them, too, no-go for girls. (An exception is the Bois de Vincennes in the south east of the city. This was always the haunt of the keen amateur, the housewife turning tricks for pin money or whatever. These ladies resented the incursion of the boys from the Bois de

Boulogne and protected their patch armed with *batteries de cuisine*.)

Drive on. Keep cruising and you'll see how fruitless the police's purges have been. Beside the Allée de Longchamp there are lights and men slouching against a canopied booth and haphazardly parked cars. There is steam and the smell of frying. Among the cars is a refrigerator on wheels. You can take post-fellationary refreshment here: merguez and chips, sandwiches (Gruyère or saucisson), cold beer, un Pepsi (none of them cheap). All over the Bois are these enterprising small businesses parasitical on the game. No, said the midget grease-ball serving at one of them, no I don't give the prostitutes cut prices. No, he said, I won't tell you what my takings are. Then he squirted a dollop of harissa from a polythene bottle on to my merguez and all over my wrist. A travelo whore dressed in mules, legwarmers and a sort of psychedelic nappy came out of the bushes and strutted in front of two blousons noirs (notable for the luxuriance of their sideburns). Even beside the vat of bubbling chip oil it was chill. Most of the hookers here warm themselves with drink. This one, a head taller than her two prospective johns, swung a clutch bag with a bottle's neck protruding from it – cooking brandy or armagnac like tractor fuel most likely. Alcohol habits are common, so is dependence on methylamphetamine; the preferred type is Tenuate Dospan; the only rule is, *always exceed the prescribed dose*. If you're going to give forty blow jobs in a night it's no doubt just as well to be blocked.

Head: 50 francs. Fuck: 100 francs. If you want to fuck a pre-operative T/S you'll have to join the club, get a lot of chocolate on your biscuit: 100 francs. We are not, understand, talking big wonga here. To make a crust at this game, at these rates, you have to do it again and again. The cost of living is high. A week's rent of a flyblown room will absorb two nights' earnings. Illegal immigrants (which is what most of the Brazilians are) comprise a group that is notoriously exploitable. Alcoholic spirits are as expensive now as in Britain. If you go to the hairdresser three times a *day* that too mounts up. Fetishistic lingerie works out dear, so do those shoes (which

no one was ever meant to walk in) from Ernest, 75 Bvd de Clichy 18eme. Such schmutter does not last long. You send money home to Rio or São Paulo: your mother thinks you work in theatre, and so you do. You save for Casablanca. You save for your fare back to Rio for the Carnival, you save for your costume for the Carnival. You pay protection. You buy a false passport. You get busted for tax (on estimated earnings) every time the police take you in. It takes four or five months of twice weekly black market hormonal injections before your breasts begin to grow. You crave silicone injections and implants. This agent of facial and bodily change is so crucial to the travelo that monopolies in it are established and challenged; murders are committed because of it. A travelo called Dottore Dolly has held the monopoly for some time, illegally importing the stuff from the USA. One of her predecessors ended up in the Seine at Asnières. It is not a safe line to be in, it is only worth pursuing if the profits are high. Dottore Dolly rarely hooks now. The results of her service can be pitiful: Lips swollen like detumescent dildoes; Balloon breasts whose nipples are monstrously asymmetrical in their disposition; Cheekbones so heightened as to curtail vision. Much silicone is self-administered with veterinary syringes which are never sterilized, always shared. The standard of cosmetic surgery which is submitted to is not high either. A nose job is 'something you have done when it's raining and you're bored'. Removal of the thyroid cartilage (la pomme d'Adam) can be especially messy; indeed it can be so famously messy that it is increasingly avoided. And the trip to Casablanca is becoming rarer too – whether because Burou's reluctance to operate is a reality or because the price is so high I don't know. Either way, the result is that there is an increasing proportion of travelos who *look* more or less like women but are equipped with male genitalia and intend to stay that way. There is no shortage of demand for them which causes understandable resentment among certain post-operative transsexuals and divides the caste into two.

There is insidious disco music in Rue St Denis. There are coital rhythms with girls you'll never meet whispering promises

they'll never keep, they'll fake anything. The pyramidal piles of Tunisian cakes and the swags of neon are as bright as alcoholic delirium. The girls are dressed not for comfort, not for warmth, but for cystitis. They work with their bodies, and their bodies, awaiting work, have found very many ways of saying boredom, of screaming contempt for the ambulatory mass of punters. Psyche (four years post operative, as demure as is possible in a hobble-skirted cheong sam) scorned them: 'They do not want to *please*.' Between the cake shops and the peep shows (cabines privées) and the sex shops there are cinemas: '4 Salons Ultra Porno' and so on. We eventually found the one showing a film Psyche was in. (She has made, she says, eight films though how she can resolve the number is a mystery – such films are evidently cut about, spread around with no particular regard for such niceties as narrative continuity.) We sat through the usual parade of leprous bottoms pumping, of lard fed Scanda-slags plating men who should be in Abba, of close up genitals which make one realize that pornography is subject to its own laws that have nothing to do with those of eroticism. We didn't get to Psyche's film; a friend who was with us grabbed my arm and told me that she thought the raincoat behind was going to ejaculate on her hair. 'I need an umbrella if I'm going to stay in this place.' We left. Psyche told us this story in a bar; (like most of the Brazilians she has adopted a classical name, unlike nearly all of them she speaks good French – so she is able to break the bounds of the Iberophone ghetto most of her compatriots are confined to).

Quarries at night are hellish places. Stone gleams under the moon. There are bright blocks of it, cliffs of it which it doesn't do to fall over – there are rocks at the bottom of the cliffs that are like the teeth of forgotten beasts. In the morning you'll see how grave the damage can be. One of the men who found Petite Yvonne vomited. And so, almost, did I when I saw her – and that was more than six months after (says Psyche). Petite Yvonne was the youngest of eight children born to Corsican parents in Nice. Her father was a mechanic who helped out a *caïd*, ran errands, put about the strong arm. But he was fairly clean. He didn't kill people. All his children were

given jobs in good businesses like hotels and ice cream factories. (*In 1979 the owner of a Nice ice cream factory and a string of ice cream parlours was found dead from pistol shots in an underground carpark. The Chief of Nice police said: 'We think that he was killed by assailants looking for a secret ice cream recipe that he was believed to be carrying.'*). Petite Yvonne went to work at a pâtisserie/confiserie, humping in bags of flour and sugar, helping with deliveries to restaurants. Petite Yvonne was called Michel then; he had neither boyfriends nor girlfriends, preferring the company of his older sisters and their friends though they, apparently, were hardly welcoming. For a year or so he was on the periphery of the transvestite milieu in Nice – this was clandestine, and his parents never knew. He abandoned his job and at the age of 19 or 20 came to Paris. He worked at an hotel off Bvd Sebastopol. It was a place where girls took rooms by the hour and Michel augmented his paltry wage by changing sheets between tricks. He saw many maps of Ireland and he envied the girls, admired their appearance and hauteur, wanted to emulate them. Cross dressing endowed him with a sexual identity, let him realize himself sexually. He frequented travelos' clubs, sought their society, was considered sweet and grave. He found himself and was, according to Psyche, happy for the first time in his life. He was nicknamed Yvonne because of a supposed resemblance to a transvestite cabaret artist of that name; Petite was added because Michel was only five feet tall. What follows is usual enough: Home – a cubicle, 6ft by 9ft, decorated with a collage from magazine pictures and mariolatrous gewgaws; Work – the Bois by night; Self-improvement – silicone, cosmetic surgery etc; Outgoings – all that I've mentioned plus remittances to a sister-in-law whose husband, P.Y.'s eldest brother, had suffered an 'industrial' injury and was unable to hold down a job. Psyche scorns this claim, says the brother was workshy; given the brother's subsequent actions – all zeal and hideously misguided notions of familial honour – it seems she has a point. What happened was that Petite Yvonne fell victim to fate and circumstance. After a scare in the Bois she was sharing a beat with Psyche on Rue de Lisbonne near Parc de Monceau. Late one night she turned down a punter in a Fiat

500 – with wheels like that he might be a welcher. She got into the next car, which Psyche *insists* was a Lagonda. The next day she told Psyche that the Lagonda driver was a restaurateur she had known in Nice and that she thought he had recognized her. (He must have been extravagantly percipient, she had by then transformed herself; maybe her voice revealed her.) She feared the worst. She was right. Her father drove, her eldest brother and her crazy brother sat either side of her – this is guesswork. This isn't: they spent five days in Paris, holed up in a pension near République, asking for her, proffering photographs of her former self. Then they found her. They turned off the autoroute home near Saulieu and dumped her in the quarry outside the pleasant village of Montsauche. The man who found her vomited because her breasts had been cut off, her hair had been shorn like that of a collaboratrice, her lips and cheeks had been cut a lot. She had been left for dead, wracked over the awful rocks. Death might have been better than this: Now she lives in the southern Paris suburb of Meudon and works in a laundry there. She lives as a man, sort of. Psyche visits her now and again. It was about Meudon that L. F. Celine wrote *Death On The Instalment Plan* and *Journey To The End Of The Night.*

The progress from a mental trap to a bodily cage to a socio-economic cell isn't happy.

1984

She Made His Dream Come True: Amanda Lear

In Provence in summer there are magpies in the lavender, scavenging. They are everywhere. They are here for local colour (avian department), they are also here for their fatidical declension. You can bend the rules. Do not be fazed by solo birds (sorrow). Accumulate sightings, keep your score: this is called serial prophecy or serious delusion. The road from Les Baux to St Rémy is bordered with pines, rocks, wrecks, picnickers, mausolea; birds love it. Here's one with yesterday's *pan bagnat*; here's a short flash of blue in the broom – two (joy); here's a third on a skeletal bough (girl). We're almost there and all the signs are *she's a girl*. Past the bin where Van Gogh was banged up, along a lane with an abundant hedge, hang left at the blue sign, follow the track which must be a torrent in winter and is just now pitted and rutty, make for the cypresses. And this thieving two-tone job lumbers through the air from a bush. Four.

Boy.

Amanda Lear was born a boy. Amanda Lear has a son by Brian Jones. Amanda Lear was born in Hong Kong in 1946, in Hanoi in 1939, in Transylvania a long time ago. Her father was Russian. He was also French, an army officer. Then again he was Indonesian. Mother – she was English, Vietnamese, French. Amanda met Salvador Dali when she was an art student in London in 1965. Amanda met Salvador Dali when she was Peki d'Oslo, dancer in the transvestite revue at Le Carrousel, Rue Colisée, Paris 8eme, in 1959. All this is true. Her multiple pasts are to be believed at will; their different facets are, if you like, parts of a kit from which you build your own Amanda (if you want to. She can't believe that anyone could fail to want to). Facts, those awkward sods like the

bones in a pike; well, facts in the matter of Amanda are of as much moment as they are in regard to any enterprise of imaginative invention. It is not the moot raw materials that are fascinating so much as the artefact they're turned into. It is the work of fiction that is meant to interest us, not its sources; though there is undeniably a base, gossipy side to all our natures . . . No, in the matter of Amanda the past is seven magpies, a story never to be told, save posthumously, and then by her own hand which has – beware – this irresistible tendency towards legerdemain and easy magic.

Her big gifts are for metamorphosis and mimesis, which are linked, which are actorish qualities attributable to players like, say, De Niro; what they bring to their art she brings to her telly programmes, concerts, recordings, domestic behaviour, poolside mores, nightclubbing, easel-jobs, gardening, her whole being. She performs these characters, all called Amanda Lear, with consummate aplomb. She is enjoyable and right now she's off duty – from being Disco Queen of Europe (which isn't a title you win in competition at a Düsseldorf strobe-hole but what the 'music' papers call her), from being Big-in-Italy, from being a Superstar – her word, not mine, though I guess it's apt: she can bring bars the length of Italy to a halt when she comes on telly and 'I've been voted nomber three most fockable girl in Italy. Bo Derek, she's nomber two most fockable . . . Fonny, you know because Italians like girls with black hairy armpits.' Amanda's armpits are, of course, nothing like that, these are bald oxters that she's showing to the Midi sun, as perfect as those parts of a body can be. She's off duty and she's relaxedly practising the Art of Living in Provence, painting canvases and plates, cultivating her garden, toying with her dog Frank Sinatra and her husband Alain Philippe, Marquis d'Argens, eating healthily, having a well sunk beside her pretty house, denying herself the opportunity to be 'the local Brigitte Bardot – she's a joke in St Tropez; she puts her house for sale so she can meet people . . . That's how she met me, how she met Romy Schneider. She's saggy – saggy face, saggy tits. Drink.' Amanda doesn't drink alcohol, nor does she take drugs; she has a marked talent for moderation, for self-control, for sane vanity. Other things she does to

avoid becoming the local Bardot include eating the doves (which she pronounces as though there's a macron over the 'o', to rhyme with mauve) that Alain Philippe breeds, swimming to keep her body supple for Latin Europe, depilating her legs with cosmetic glee, getting up early, working hard, being what she fancifully calls 'natural'. Natural is a word like 'sincere' that means just about anything. In Amanda's case it means not having a facelift, yet. 'By the time I have it the techniques will be *great*. Every year there's a great new doctor. I heard about this doctor who did Ursula Andress – next time I saw her in Rome all I could do was look at her mouth.' Natural also means aping nature with the improving zeal of the great landscape designers: Amanda has imported aged olive trees and replanted them (c£1,000 a throw); she has decapitated statues; she has painted her house an ochre-ish shade associable with Tuscany to make it look like it's been that way forever.

The house is a shrine to herself and, in a smaller way, to Dali. There are endless framed snaps of the pair of them. Her paintings are often dependent on Dali for their composition (she allows this) and on herself for their subject; she has also followed the examples of the more formulaic and less adroit surrealists Chirico and Magritte. Dali's brushwork was all flashy brio, it was not for nothing that Nabokov described him as 'Norman Rockwell's twin brother who was kidnapped by gypsies as a baby'. Dali had an illustrator's facility and a mind in a million, a conjunction of faculties that made him a remarkable painter and a dangerous teacher; his solipsistic arrogance made him impervious to and contemptuous of any divergence from his own thought. He was properly proud of his outlandish ukases and his aesthetic tyranny; he sought to 'cretinize' his devotees, i.e. to cause their mentation to be a copy of his. With Amanda he succeeded in some measure: she was, no doubt, an ideal subject and, as she admits, a willing one, his best one. She played the ape to him, learned to see through his eyes, learned to think if not like him then with the same disdain for the precepts of both the bourgeoisie and (part of the same thing) 'the Divine Left'. She received from him a thorough and extraordinary sentimental education.

More than that she studied self-advertisement with its greatest master and passed out with cap, gown, flying colours, honours, the lot. Most of all she is perhaps his greatest creation: one of the many rumours that gained her notoriety was that she had had a sex change paid for by Dali. She now claims that all such rumours were begun by her in an attempt to attract attention when she switched from modelling to singing in the early 70s. Believe this or not, as you will; she believes it, she says she's always been a woman. She's probably right; she *knows*. Dali was, then, a sort of father to her; the idea of procreation was one he abhorred, partly because of his impotence, partly because of his belief that genius is not genetically transmittable. Amanda is the nearest he came to a child of his own.

'He was my guru, my father, my lover, my teacher . . .' It gets more complicated, not less, this story of polymorphous possession. Dali vetted her boyfriends, and found most of them wanting, banal – in one or two cases he was clearly wrong; one that he did not find wanting was red haired with pale lashes and eyebrows. Dali took him for an albino – in this too he was clearly wrong – and took to him because he believed that albinos bring good fortune. He beseeched Amanda to find a husband who was rich and homosexual and who would allow her to have whatever lovers she pleased. 'I wanted to have *lots* of conquests. I wanted to treat them badly, men . . . because of what happened to my mother. I used to be a bit of a groupie. I thought they had glamour, but all they wanted was money and a mock Tudor mansion and to snort cocaine with Britt Ekland. That's not glamorous.' The move from groupie to singer is just a shimmy across the footlights. But although Amanda's contacts included David Bowie, who has her facility for performing roles in life rather than on screen, and Brian Ferry, she came unstuck in Britain. Her records, phone sex at 45 revolutions per minute, have done well in Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the USA, Japan – but never here. 'I am not,' she says unnecessarily, 'family entertainment.' The thing is, in Europe family entertainment isn't 'family entertainment'; the oafish prurience and smirking smuttiness of British telly light entertainment is nowhere to

be found. This, of course, is because British shows derive from the music hall and the Moss Empires, and European shows derive from cabaret; the latter are characteristically guilt free.

The show which accounts for Amanda's celebrity with a non-disco audience is called *Viva Le Donne* (*Long Live Women*) and rather echoes the title of one of her records, 'Incredibilimente Donna' ('Unbelievably Woman' – 'woman' used here in an adjectival sense). It runs for two hours once a week from September until April and is about to start its third season: it comprises sketches, in which Amanda plays a superstar called Amanda Lear, song and dance routines of a camp sumptuousness, interviews conducted by an interviewer called Amanda Lear, guest groups introduced by a pop aficionado called Amanda Lear, a faked up phone-in, a talent contest, a fashion show and so on. She is quite a trouper, a mix of Janet Street Porter with an orthodontist, Russell Harty with grace, Tina Turner with a blonde toop. The end credits – and this is a show with hefty production values and a crew of thousands – pass over Amanda singing a song called 'No Regrets' whose lyrics go thus, 'Ain't got no regrets, this is my life', and on and on. She sings this on a bed, half lit and naked save for a feather boa; the effect is sexy and subtle in the way that actresses gobbling up bars of Flake in the ads is subtle.

It's subtle in that it never trespasses beyond the bounds of analogue. In this show and in the promo videos for her records the trappings of sex, its habitual mail-order props, are all over the place but the core is missing – there's lots of promise and no delivery, they are erotically centrifugal, the acceptable cheek of soft porn. Actually it's debatable how acceptable a lyric like this is: 'You, me, satisfaction, harmony. You, me, satisfaction guaranteed.' (The terminal 'd' is silent.) I mean acceptable to the disco punter: Amanda certainly hasn't got where she is today by overestimating the taste of pubescent boppers but this is stronging it a bit, isn't it? 'Hoh,' shrugs Amanda, 'the teenage girls want to be me. The women, the 35-year-olds want to be me. The men want to fock me.' So, the formula works. No question. Some men, though, want not to fock her but rather to fock her about. Greeks for instance.

'You know what they say about shaking hands with a Greek?'

'Tell me.'

'You need to count your fingers after. The Acropolis. You know the Acropolis?'

'Sure.'

'I didn't climb up there. I didn't visit the Acropolis. You know why? *Because they didn't pay me for my concert the night before.* Greeks.'

The French can be Greeks too, especially showbiz French. They all want Cartier watches before they'll promote your show. *Une montre Cartier* is French for 'a very large drink.' French for a normal size drink is *graissage de pot de vin*, but these small measures are things of the past in showbiz. The rot set in with Claude François, the squat blond composer of 'My Way' and singer of countless yé-yé hits who died with an electric fire in his bath. Clo-Clo (as he was undignifiedly known) wasn't Greek. 'He was Egyptian. Pied noir. He did things like he was still in Egypt.' I.e., he dispensed expensive watches and set an example to every hustler in Paris. Alain Philippe, who is manifestly too pleasant and too easy going for this mean-minded world, got burnt when he was a record producer, he lost an awful lot on Sylvie Vartan. Now he gardens and keeps his wife's diary and cooks and fetches drinks and drives to the shops in his bruised Lada (Amanda has a Mercedes with Swiss plates). The other things that he does a lot are drive up into the Alpilles to fetch stones for the folly that he's building, and change his swimming trunks. He has one of the largest collections of swimwear I've ever seen: tight to-the-knee surfboy jobs, cut-down blue jeans, cache-sexes, bum-bras, loose swing-eezee modesty pants. He has all the trunks money can buy. Amanda is more frugal. She sticks to a striped one piece that shows off her figure fine: her skin is deep manilla and is kept just so by any of the nine tanning agents in a basket beside her; her hair is very blonde by will with roots chromatically suggestive of a beast more fearsome than the mouse she admits to – panther, say; heavy sunglasses emphasize her minimal prognathism, her cast of jaw and mouth is one that reveals the bone formation, it's like John

Evert Lloyd's – Dali admired this in her, would he have admired it in him? She admires dentistry and dentists above all else; her best friend is married to one and she's proud of that. She looks altogether good for her age, whatever it is. ('Only a fool doesn't lie about her age.' A. Lear, 1985.) She has looked after herself better than the other blondes who hung around Chelsea and the Rolling Stones: Marianne Faithfull ('She loves to suffer'), Anita Pallenberg ('She was born 2,000 years old'), Nico ('All she wanted was to sing "Deutschland Uber Alles"'). Amanda was exceptional in that world of minatory infantilism: she was not 'post-verbal'; she knew what was going on in the big 'straight' world; she had read something other than Tolkien and Hesse. Those, anyway, are the impressions I retain from meeting her twice 16 years ago. She was outgoing, a worldling, the recipient of a culture that comprehended more than progressive rock and the wretched 'underground' and a pathetic snobbery based on a hierarchy of conformist exquisites with boutiques, painted caravans, LSD dealerships and a drawl you never hear today. Nonetheless she did fall far into that insular parochial milieu, to have survived which, let alone subsequently prospered, is a proper feat. Most of those people are junk-stiffs or broken or funny farmers now. The totemic death was Brian Jones's, to which attaches a Chinese boxful of conspiracy theories, lending it spurious moment so that it competes with J. F. Kennedy's, propelling it into myth. Amanda, who was close to Jones – and must have mirrored him before he grew puffy and liverish – certainly seems still to invest rock and rollers with a greater importance than they merit. But, then, they adored her and flattered her – a German group, Kraftwerk, wrote a song about her; Lou Reed wrote 'Wild Child' for her; she is just the sort of person Mick Jagger sang about in his little vignettes of clubs, poppers, disposable blondes and trash parties; she might be the protagonist of Peter Sarstead's bathetic chant 'Where Do You Go To My Lovely'.

'Look. Mussolini, Kennedy, Tyrone Power – people would die for them. Now it's the rock stars who they'd die for, not the politicians. The power belongs to the rock stars. Politicians – huh, they all look like taxi drivers.'

'But you like taxi drivers.'

'Oh *that*, that's just a sexual thing. Mitterand – he's never asked me to the Elysée. You know what he's done to France . . . It's not surprising that Le Pen – Le Pen's saying what all the French think but won't say for themselves.'

They actually try to say it in graffiti, but many of M. Le Pen's devotees have trouble in spraying their swastikas the right way round and so unintentionally cover walls with signs that are indicative of peace and good luck.

'Do you admire Le Pen?'

'Hitler asked Dali to inscribe a book to him. Dali sent him it – with a Christian cross inscribed. Dali reckoned that Hitler understood then that all was lost . . . No. I admire strong women – Indira Gandhi, Eva Peron, Catherine the Great, Margaret Thatcher. I do not like weakness. My idols were the strong women in comics, like Octobriana . . .'

'Oct –?'

'She was in a Russian comic, Octobriana. Bowie showed it to me. We bought the film rights and I was going to play her. She has a red star on her forehead, platinum hair. She can do things Russians can't do: she's immortal, she drinks Coca Cola. I like women with male qualities – stubborn, wilful . . . For years I thought it would be better to be a man. Now things have changed.' Her ambition, she announces in an ORTF documentary about her is to be 'une femme pas comme les autres' – this, again, can mean anything but it's just about indisputable that she's succeeded in that ambition. There are not, after all, many (perhaps any) women who have such a singular angle on such a singular gamut of subjects.

Gina Lollobrigida. This actress overheard Dali in a New York restaurant expounding his idea that the human anus invariably has 36 wrinkles around it. 'It's like a dilating lens,' explains Amanda. Dali used to take talcum prints of the bottoms of new-born babies to show that he was right. 'Maestro,' asked Ms Lollobrigida, 'do you believe I have 36 wrinkles?' Dali accompanied her to an hotel room where, by candlelight, he carried out an inspection; he was of course quite unable to see, let alone count. 'He wanted to freak her out. So he told her she had only 32. She was really worried.'

Although Amanda has been telling this story for years she has omitted it from her book, maybe because of the assistance Ms Lollobrigida gave her in the matter of:

The Pope. 'I did a painting of him.' It represents the pontiff with his head sticking out of a blue sea with St Peter's on a far shore, like S. Giorgio Maggiore. The Pope wouldn't accept it. Amanda petitioned the Archbishop of Milan. 'He said I was after publicity. I said yes, if I didn't want publicity I'd have painted a taxi driver. I painted it because I wanted a letter from the Pope. I wanted to meet him. So I asked a friend in Rome and he said I had to ask Gina Lollobrigida if I wanted to meet the Pope because her secretary, an Argentinian boy, is the boyfriend of one of the guys in the Vatican and he can always arrange for you to get the Pope's blessing.' Amanda thus received the Pope's blessing.

Russia. 'I am *very* big in Russia. But they talk roubles. I want to talk dollars. We talked fur coats.'

'Get paid in Ladas, for Alain Philippe.' A.P. was just driving off on another errand.

'Huh. He's got one. He doesn't need any more. No one needs more than one Lada.'

Amanda receives a lot of fan mail from Russia. One letter, in the effortful hand of a backward teenager, said: 'I have no mother yet. You are my mother.' Amanda has a high opinion of the male groupies she has encountered behind the Iron Curtain: 'Discreet. They don't kiss and tell.'

Sex. 'There's been too much. Too much free love. Without being religious I'd like to be in a convent.'

Italy. 'The country's held together by string. It's supposed to be bankrupt but they all eat well. They all buy expensive clothes. I'd love to live in Italy but I'd be kidnapped. My last tour in Italy I had bodyguards – but I thought: "What if someone gives them more money than I give them?" These guys are for hire after all. All my equipment was taken. In Sicily naturally. After two days I got a phone call asking for 5 million lire. I paid of course.'

Perry Como. Amanda has recorded one of his former barber's hits of the late 50s, 'Magic Moments', as her latest disc. The backing is disco, what she does to the words is not precisely

sing them, but talk them in the manner of a 'diseuse'. Her voice has been compared to a Black and Decker and to that of *Marlene Dietrich*. When this former legend heard that Amanda was to play her on stage she said: 'At least they could get someone who could sing.'

Mae West. 'Very often I send myself up like Mae West. One of my greatest assets is to be witty.'

Snow White. 'I fell in love with the Queen. I thought Snow White was a drip because she scrubbed for those awful dwarfs.'

Queen Elizabeth II. 'Dali painted the Royal Arms as a gift for the Coronation. It hangs above her bed. I love the Queen, I'm monarchist, I adore continuity. It's silly for me, a marquise, to wiggle about on stage.'

Locus Solus. Amanda is one of probably half a dozen people who realize that this novel by Raymond Roussel was inspired by the late nineteenth century rock carvings at Rotheneuf in Brittany. Roussel was much admired by Dali and travelled the world in his own yacht from which he did not disembark, preferring that his imagination remain uncontaminated by the 'reality' of places.

And *Amanda Lear*. 'Who'll take her seriously as a painter – the sexy frivolous Amanda. Jackie Kennedy will always be remembered, whatever she does, no matter who she marries, as the one who was at Dallas in the back of that car. Me, I'll always be remembered as the one who was supposed to have been a boy. Even when I'm an eccentric old lady in Chelsea that is what will be said about me.'

For once, Amanda, you're quite in step with the rest of the world, rather than a few leagues askew of it.

1985

April In Hay: Ms Ashley's Rural Round

The diurnal coloration of the Black Mountains is that of martial camouflage – brown blobs, mucus green backdrop. Nature's mimicry of man's idealized imitation of Her is uncanny and lends the mountains a certain theatricality. By night they are black as a coma and headlights bob and swoop. Static headlights are bestial beacons, signs to all the Marches that a sheep-dip is going on; no one in Hay takes much notice of such things. The whole world has heard of Hay now – the town that became a bookshop and a mecca for unfrocked priests, cashiered officers and similar eccentrics, that declared itself independent, that declared war on something called the Welsh Development Board and on the Welsh Tourist Office, that has Richard Booth as its king and April Ashley as its first lady.

Some people there try to get you to enter a sort of pronominal collusion when talking about AA. There is a ghost of a nudge in their voices when they call AA she, a knowingness that suggests they are willing you to say *he*, that what they're looking for is a moment's locker-room abandon and a guilty good time. At the same time they watch what they say when AA herself is about; they do not want to be seen to ally themselves with the boorish bobby who, the time he arrested AA last year, locked her up in the men's cells at West End Central. And, further, they know that AA gives as good as she gets. The thing is that because AA's fate has been to get fame or notoriety because of what she is, rather than because of what she does, the world scrutinizes her for evidence of what she is, which means looking for signs of what she was, for the tache of maleness or for the obvious dissemblance of it.

Women seem to be more fazed by transsexuality (in the

direction male to female) than are men. Their quiddity is threatened and mocked, and their exclusivity made moot. A number of women I talked to reckoned that there was something presumptuous and self-deluding in this act of forgery, that a woman could not be created by hormonal treatment and vagino-plasty and that the fact of living as a woman for more than twenty years was no mitigation and what does 'living as a woman' mean anyway if it precludes menstruation, the possibility of bearing children etc. AA is unable to get away from the source of her celebrity – everything has got to come back to sex in the frictional sense, as though a sex change were nothing more than the construction of new and contrary genitalia. It is of course immeasurably more. It is the physical confirmation of psychological conviction and, it is clear, a necessity – though you may wonder what happened before surgery rendered such necessities realizable. It is, if you like, more akin to a correction than to a mutation – an adjustment to the meat dish to make it fit with the very unusual chromosomal salad. AA got corrected 22 years ago this May in Casablanca and says: 'I lost my central purpose by achieving it, the problem was what to do afterwards.' It is in degree, not aspiration, that this change differs from countless ones that are made all the time: changes of name, improvements of accent, fabrications of background and so on – the usual gambits of the socially mobile, i.e., the self-created. And what to do afterwards is the perennial dilemma of all who achieve revolutions, be they public or covert; AA was not alone here though no doubt the reaction to her revolution, while commensurate with its magnitude, did to some extent solve the dilemma by providing her with her role of professional transsexual, someone who just has to be. So every now and again she is hauled on to the telly or made the subject of an article like this. Soon, probably, she is really going to make it and be on the Michael Parkinson Show. They have in common the fact that they have forfeited the chance to reproduce themselves, otherwise it's hard to imagine less similar souls. AA relishes any chance to snipe at the liberal orthodoxies and received pieties that media-folk subscribe to. She knows very well that people want to treat her

as a cause but says that she has nothing in common with other transsexuals save the very fact of her transsexuality and that she is representative of nothing beside herself.

Hay is set messily on hills near the Wye. It is not a notably attractive town. It seems unfinished (i.e. no genius like Casson was called in to sort it out) though the sheer haphazardness of its streets with their wrong cambers is said to have charm. The highest building is the shell of the king's castle, burnt out a few years ago; the king has now removed to outside the town. The highest habitable building is AA's house, a three-storeyed, double-fronted, devilishly plain Edwardian place with lots of steps up to its front door. She knows the advantage that these steps give her. She looms high above you in a stately fashion that is uncontaminated by spontaneity; she has a talent for effects, is good at entrances, exits, sweeping about. Her gestures have a rehearsed immediacy and the extent of her indiscretions seems gauged, which is not to say that her indiscretions are thus tempered, rather that they display a measure of calculation. She is destined to play herself eternally, and you cannot but wonder what she is like alone without an audience, albeit an audience of one.

Like I say, she looms. She looms white in the afternoon in a full-drop towelling gown on which there is not a speck of grime. AA is notably tall even in low-heeled mules. Her face is gleamy with slap. Her curlered hair is all wrapped in a turban for later. It is very blonde, very recently blonde, a brand of blonde named Florida (she likes that state). Her hair went grey not so long ago; it used to be black and her colouring, once upon a time, was rather Irish – her natal name was Jamieson. She was left this house by an octogenarian friend whom she looked after in the years before he died. It is too big for one person, it was built as a boarding house. She uses only three of its thirteen rooms. These rooms are spruce, and recall the tidiness of provincial hotels. AA is the sort of person who empties an ashtray as soon as there is one cigarette end in it and she is a zealously attentive hostess, forever refilling glasses. Her manners and her solicitousness are slightly exaggerated, self-proclaiming in the way that those of decent Americans are (she also affects some American usages

– gotten, fall, and so on). AA lives alone with Florabella, a tawny whippet. This dog is doted on. The carpet is sea-green. The curtains and some of the soft furnishings are rose-patterned. There are a couple of dreary Thirties fireplaces, all butterscotch tiles and dingy grouting. There is a samovar converted into a table lamp. Also: lots of framed snapshots, some American-tan bambooish furniture, a vase of carnations, a sofa with fish netting stretched over it and Jap print cushions, necessarily small piles of 'De Luxe' and 'Boulevard', a twelve-year-old copy of 'Queen', a white coffee-table like a display unit displaying coffee-table books (Utrillo, Toulouse-Lautrec, Spanish Art and Architecture, Erté etc). At the base of one of the fireplaces is an impressive Indian file of nail-varnish bottles, brightly daubed warriors. AA's interest in clothes and in her battery of maquillage is chronic and attractive and is part of an altogether larger preoccupation with appearances, surfaces. At some time in her life, in her late teens very likely or in her early twenties when she was (along with Amanda Lear, né Alain Tapp) a female impersonator in Paris, Cannes, Milan, she evidently played the mimicking monkey and through imitation acquired a sort of idealised outward femininity that, like the subsequent operation, accorded with her conception of how she felt.

AA's biographer ('ghost' implies a level of achievement far below that of 'April Ashley's Odyssey') is Duncan Fallowell. He is a southpaw, drives a Datsun sports car and adheres to Wilde's dictum about criticism being a sort of autobiography. 'Books and Bookmen' used to pay so badly per word – and so late – that one was always inclined to write overlength. DF's way was to fill his reviews with details of his eating habits, smoking habits, versatile concupiscence, domestic arrangements and so on. Thus the world – all right, the few score readers of the magazine – learned for instance that he was living in a North Kensington rooming-house whose tenants included a retired Lancashire chip frier. This man, nostalgic for his former career, used daily to deep-fry meals in his cupboard-size room with the result that its walls were thickly coated with lard. DF, rather than write down telephone messages for him would inscribe them with his finger in the

wall-lard. So you might have thought that he would go one better and use AA's autobiography as his own. Restraint won the day, just about. I mean, he didn't actually need to let on that when he met AA (Oxford, 1968) he was writing 'a percussion ballet' called 'The Pink Swastika.' I keep v. mum about the sub-Orton efforts of my late teens. Different though to admit to a devotion to The Velvet Underground, the only rock group that could read and write. Here were morgue voices, encomia of junk, polymorphous perversity as the norm, the natural order on its uppers, a sort of wayward hubris. Something of all this inevitably informs 'April Ashley's Odyssey', though it has none of the institutionalized weirdness that you find in the stuff of most of Lou Reed's lairy avatars.

AA and DF have similar speech patterns (at least to these untrained and unsyringed ears they have) and have a similar sense of humour, one that is dependent on an accumulation of meticulously observed detail. They both have a taste for the sort of breezy truthfulness that fools consider tactless or tasteless – at its milder end this takes the form of describing a telly peer as 'a small gorilla mated with Mick Macmanus'; at the other end it comprises stuff which this country's preposterous libel laws preclude the possibility of recounting. They both tend to drop names, the same names often: Anthony Burgess who compares transsexuality to changing planets; Alan Minter who says that his restaurant in earshot of Gatwick Airport serves only the finest meat; Alan Minter's mother who says the same; Gustav Leven, the Perrier magnate, whose bottles, *pace* AA, are shaped that way to resemble English pub skittles (this at the insistence of a valetudinarian and homesick Englishman who put up the money to exploit the source); Sarah Churchill who, allegedly, never forgave AA for growing up; Lord this and Lord that – AA, especially, is fond of titles. Their relationship is, apparently, like that of mutually appreciative siblings, though they do not spare each other (or themselves). DF is privy to much that he has not bothered to mention, though probably because it would dam the flow of a brusque and hairy narrative (littered with suicides, car crashes, young deaths, wasted lives) rather than because it would offend AA.

Further north, in what was once Montgomeryshire there are unrestructured Sixties hippies, real sordids who live in wigwams with their loathsome dogs and filthy children. Many of them go armed in case of attack by locals. Xenophobia is rampant and indiscriminate. In a pub in Newtown I once asked for Campari. 'What's that?' 'It's a sort of bitters.' 'The only sort of bitter we have here is Greenall Whitley. Try somewhere else.' In Hay there are single malt whiskies and cheeses that have never known the kiss of plastic and quite reasonable restaurants (that is, by the standards of provincial Britain).

Watch AA sweep into one. She has an indubitable magnetism and physical power and this is as good a stage as any on which to exert it; she towers above the young farmers in their subfusc best and the young farmers' girls in their tasteful little ensembles. 'Isn't that April Ashley?' booms one YF. Heads turn and all that. She is all dressed in white – tightish full length shift, sequined stole, massively pendulous earrings, two strings of pearls and one of jet bits, gold sandals with four-inch heels. She orders lots of whisky, eats tentatively, drinks quickly, talks quite loudly, again displays great solicitousness in the way she serves those at table with her. 'What,' she asks, prodding a blackcurrant sorbet that I'm eating, 'do you call that colour?' 'Clitoris pink . . .' She taps the table triumphantly. 'Snap. That's what I call it too.' It's close to the shade Nabokov called glans mauve. She insists on green chartreuse. The owner of the place, a man with forearms like telegraph poles, helps AA down some steps on the way to the car, to a public house which keeps unusual hours. All down the hills of Hay topers are tumbling and their shadows are gambolling up walls into gables. The clock at the top of the spiky tower knocks out the hour.

In the bar the landlord is slumped in a Windsor chair with his feet on a stool and a ring in his ear. He looks about 22. His wife is complaining about the schools in Hay – obligatory Welsh and such dreck. She is the daughter of local land and their marriage transcends class divisions. Her preoccupation with schools is what today's educationalists call 'a bit previous', for their child is not yet a year old. A man with a beard

glares but then they always do. Against the bar lean two midgets, their mad dull eyes just about level with the beery shiny surface; their patois is incomprehensible, so is the fact that their puffy nylon coats are unadorned by stickers proclaiming a devotion to Havoline or Duckhams. They talk very quickly, gesture wildly, turn as one like they were conjoined twins. A boy behind the bar refills their glasses without them asking.

Watch AA in here. She is one of those people whose profile does not quite accord with her full face. An argument with the landlord about the best way to cook salmon culminates in his fetching a frozen fish, a potent weapon. AA steps in, wants to be photographed with it. In the corner are a couple. He has black hair with a widow's peak that reaches almost to his eyebrows and thick third-world lips. She keeps saying to anyone who will listen, 'I'm going.' But she doesn't. Lips looks as if he has just come down from a hill farm. AA is getting loud. She pirouettes, her shoulder blades are very fine. Lips turns out to come from the other end of Britain. Someone opens another bottle of whisky. AA autographs a proof copy of The Book and a sheaf of pages falls out. A large dog wanders in. The landlord recites more receipts. The midgets stagger out, their speech is so slurred and slow that it is recognizable after all as English that they spoke like. Outside this pub DF got into a fight once but tonight no one is in much shape to throw punches and the belligerent frozen salmon has been put away. Lips's companion goes alone. Lips puts his arm round a fit-looking middle-aged man. AA is escorted home.

The idea that Hay is a farcical Arcady is winning and not that wrong-headed unless you take into account what it looks like. Just as AA's change can be seen as an act of sexual utopianism so perhaps was her move there, more conventionally, unconsciously utopian. It attracts people – as did the similarly physically drab land settlements and communes of the nineteenth century – in search of regeneration or, at least, tolerance and indulgence. DF says that it fosters polymorphous perversity. (You suspect that he might say the same of Luton.) What he means is that in an area that is not populous you

have to take what you can get. AA's liaisons are not complicated. She is currently fond of an army officer, and is being unsuccessfully wooed by a man from "Bracken".

Richard Booth, king of Hay, professes a Utopianism that is akin to the Guild Socialism of the early Twenties and Chesterton's Distributism – small-scale, decentralized, practical, abhorrent of bureaucracies. There was actually a Distributist commune established between Hay and Abergavenny at Capel-y-ffin by Eric Gill in 1928. The king, I was told by AA, is very shy. 'Be dynamic,' she said. We walked into the hall of the vast Edwardian house that he occupies on the edge of the Black Mountains. A wiry grey-haired man fell down the wide staircase. He got up and apologized. His face was magenta and purple with interesting greenish bits. His flies were fastened with a napkin pin. He apologized again and scuttled up the stairs. The king appeared looking rather shambolic and doing nothing to suggest shyness unless, of course, extreme volubility is his way of dissembling shyness. The first thing he did was to hand round some rather good cider (flat, opaque, potent). The next thing he did was to list some of the things he hates; this bit took a long time. Here are some of the things he hates: Tertiary education. The Secretary of State for Wales, a man called Edwards who is 'a complete arsehole'. The Arts Council. Thatcher. Grants to tourist hotels. Supermarket bread (causes stomach ulcers). The Development Board for Rural Wales. A man with a degree in regional economics from Lancaster, 'just like a corned beef inspector', who was lecturing somewhere or other to small shopkeepers – the king stopped the lecture. The king then wandered off and AA showed me a risible Welsh Tourist Board brochure: 'Look how those sheep have been brushed and washed for the photo.'

The king reappeared. Did I want to hear his new theory of evolution? Surely. So he told me how the most profitable thing in Hay before his arrival was the fruit machine in the British Legion. He had also told DF this. He then went through half a dozen files before finding a newspaper photograph of Edwards the arsehole opening a new fruit machine factory. AA pointed to the 'marmalade' that she had left round the rim of her cider glass – lipstick, and began to describe how she felt

'like a Lady Macbeth of the seas' when a shark she had caught bled all over her. The king then embarked on his new theory of evolution. It was worth waiting for. The man with the napkin pin in his flies put his head round the door but had heard it before, no doubt, so went away. It's like this: jogging, you see, is subliminal horseback riding. Now, how the apes happened to improve themselves is that they jumped on to the backs of horses and rode, and bumping up and down caused the vitamins B1 and B2 in their stomachs to go up to their brains, thereby enlarging the latter organ and causing apes to turn into homsap. So the king's new political party Rural Revival is going to emphasize the primacy of hippoculture.

In his numerous stables and outhouses the king (who owns enough secondhand books to restock the Babylon library) refurbishes gigs and landaus, keeps pigs and chickens, presses cider, builds shelves. He pointed across a valley to a stretch of coniferous Forestry Commission Land and said that he was thinking of writing one of his pamphlets about how to smash a Forestry Commission gate. The man with the napkin pin asked me if I'd give him a lift to London. When I said yes he said that he'd have to think about it because he had so much to do. DF tells me that he deserted from the king's father's regiment many years ago, that he is a great polymath, that he'll live the rest of his life in Hay.

DF has gone already, to the riverside at Pangbourne. AA wants to leave, fancies Australia, 'the California of the 80s'. She seems here to be on a different scale to everyone around her, and refulgent, the bright bit in a dun dream. She puts on her cloak and waits for a man whose house is full of Beckford memorabilia to pick her up and take her to her admirer in "Bracken". 'It's rather churchy, that cloak, the colour.' 'Rather Nazi. Prussian blue. Oh, I know, *darling*, they were Bavarian.'

1982

Stuffed: The Taxidermist's Life

The New York taxi driver is a bit player in a thousand articles, a man with an angle on the world, a man with a wisecrack for every contingency, a man whose every fare (it seems) is a writer zealously hoarding every pearl of mean street wisdom as it drops from Brooklyn lips. The New York taxi driver is as ubiquitous as once was Sam Kydd. The York taxi driver, on the other hand, the York taxi driver had, till now, not even copped a walk-on. No reason why not. The guy whose Jap saloon I got in the back of at York Station just after 9.00 P.M. on 26 September 1986 was every bit as foul mouthed, philosophical, wised-up and engagingly blokeish as Lexington's best. He drove me to a petrol station to buy aspirin. He told me the beer at the university was grot – 'I should know: professional pisshead.' He asked why I was going to the university. 'Guild of Taxidermists' conference,' I told him. That did it. One joke about stuffing too witlessly obscene to repeat and two further jokes about stuffing simply too witless. When he dumped me outside a lump of concrete stained like a urinal and called Langwith College he said, evidently insouciant of his own performance: 'You'll be hearin' lots o' facetious jokes then . . . Stoof this, stoof that . . .' Had I been a taxidermist I'd have hit him with my otter. As it was I gave him a massive tip and asked him in for a pint that he declined.

Had he come in with me the first taxidermist he'd have met would have been a man called C. David Astley (a veteran of punk bands and Temple's 'The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle') whose trousers are so tight that you wonder how many hours, days even, has he lain in a bath with these on? Taxi driver and taxidermist would have found themselves in disaccord. C. David, like most of his fellows, is sensitive about the use of the

word *stuff*: it's not, he insisted, descriptively accurate. The word he prefers is *mount*, and it's not a euphemism; the fact that its paronomastic capacity is as great as that of *stuff* is something to ignore. Thirty-six hours later a demonstration in the Physics Faculty lecture theatre is patently of *stuffing*; a young man has dextrously peeled a squirrel and is now filling its pelt with woodshavings. Actually it's a bit more complicated than that, but you get the idea. There's a sort of collective unease among his audience that I should be watching him rather than David Weatherly over there; David is apparently making good the damage done to an otter that has suffered a caesarian section. His method is modern. The young man with the squirrel is proceeding according to allegedly outmoded principles. But, I remark to the man beside me, Chris Stoate (his real name), it seems to work. Is he alone in employing this old method still? No, says Mr Stoate (an authority whose book on the subject is out in April), traditional methods are still, I believe, widely used in commercial practice.

Here we have an illustration of the fundamental schism in British taxidermy. There is of course a full complement of minor schisms but they all devolve from this central gulf – the gulf between museum taxidermists such as Mr Stoate and commercial taxidermists such as Mike Gadd who now has his squirrel inside out like an X-rated glove puppet. The position is this. Ten years ago British taxidermy was, according to taxidermal wisdom, on the skids. The Guild of Taxidermists was founded to raise standards. It did so. Now British taxidermy is as good as any in the world, as good even as American taxidermy. What, you may ask, does *good* mean? Every one of the hundred and twenty bods here will give a different version of the same answer – good taxidermy is that which best serves natural history, that which is most acutely verisimilar and zoologically accurate. There is, though, little consensus about how these ends are achieved. There are manifold means of imitating life – taxidermy is more than a craft. Technically and artistically there are scores of routes to the same goal.

These quasi-scientific preoccupations militate against an appreciation of the taxidermy that is probably most popular

with the 'lay' public – Victorian tableaux. The museum wallahs in particular come down hard on this gear, deprecate it as the fruit of poor observation. They consequently abhor nineteenth century animal painting which was often reliant on contemporary taxidermy; the gooey anthropomorphism of Landseer is particularly detested. It all seems as much a period piece as the campus of York University, and as irrelevant, i.e. it has nothing to teach today's practitioners save what to avoid.

Commercial taxidermists can hardly afford to adopt so fastidious a position. They work to private commissions and it's often the punter that calls the tune: hence the inclusion in the conference exhibition of a number of works that are Victorian pastiches, though no one is very eager to admit that this is what they are. These works sit anomalously beside those of, say, Michael Neilson and Emily Mayer, who are capable of achieving a quite disconcerting verisimilitude. I first encountered Ms Mayer's springer spaniel sprawled on a rug and a jersey with a hairdryer beside it. The hairdryer, it turned out, was a fortuity – one that lent the dog a presençe so troubling, so *vital*, that I had to go and prod it, just to make sure: in passing through the mirror into this fantastical state where it apes its former self this dog becomes a trickster putting one over on us. The effect on our perceptions (on mine, anyway) is greater than that prompted by Duane Hanson's photorealist sculptures. The dog is extraordinary because its literality is in overdrive.

Mr Neilson's monitor lizard may not shunt us with quite such force – it's more obviously a piece of virtuoso model making – but it's still a world away from stuffed animals, animals fixed forever in attitudes of stiff spontaneity, dead animals. The ones at the van of taxidermy are often not strictly taxidermists at all – the *derm* bit, the skin, is sometimes dispensed with and what one sees, as with Neilson's monitor, is a hyper-naturalistically painted cast of an actual creature. The thing is, different methods are apt for different mammals.

What is the most appropriate method for mounting a human being? *Like a dog* – I can hear you. Get stuffed, I'm in earnest. The laws that govern the disposal of human corpses

are, according to Pat Morris, ones determined in the aftermath of the widespread grave robberies of the 1830s. Dr Morris is a lecturer in zoology at Royal Holloway College and an ambulatory cyclopaedia of taxidermy. This is a man who has conned his way into the woefully neglected museum of taxidermy in le Jardin des Plantes in Paris, a museum without a roof that has been shut for 35 years and which contains, ruinously, the earliest mounted elephant in Europe. This is a man who knows his stuff. He also knows more than anyone in Britain about hedgehogs. His history of taxidermy is due sometime at the end of this decade: if it has half the obsessive elegance of his lecture on squirrels playing bridge, frogs fencing and the influence of the Württembergian samples at the Great Exhibition of 1851 on British taxidermy, it will shift units. At this point I flunk out of asking Dr Morris what his posthumous corporeal ambition is. I further neglect to ask him whether he has ever eaten a hedgehog.

Hedgehog tastes like eel or chicken; it is cooked in clay, in embers. The caked clay is broken off taking the spines with it. (This method is actually akin to one of the more advanced taxidermic techniques.)

Human tastes like pig, whence the cannibals' appellation 'long pig'. And the problems it poses – all right, *would* pose – for taxidermists are the same problems a pig poses. Pigs and humans lack feathers and sufficient body hair to render them amenable to conventional means of mounting; there's nothing to cover the stitches (taxidermy has correspondences with upholstery and surgery). A cast would be an answer; but though it might achieve a likeness sufficient to gull someone entering the room where it sits (as it did in life with, say, a can of Harp, twenty Raffles and last month's *Fiesta*) it would lack the sheerly awesome presence of a mounted being. A reproduction is necessarily less potent than a re-creation, if only because it lacks the associational charge. *It's just like Dad* is not the same as *It is Dad, isn't it.* But this is, as they say, academic. Until those old laws are repealed we'll go on being buried or burned – processes which hide the dead with embarrassed guilt. The crippling taboo that death occasions

might be partially erased by taxidermic exhibition of the people we love.

Humans are then the most thoroughly protected species, but bats come close behind, and eagles, martens, otters, jays, falcons . . . Just as many architects resent the strength of the conservation lobby so do taxidermists consider themselves thwarted by such bodies as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, whose declared aim is to put an end to taxidermy. The daft irony is that the RSPB should get muscle at a time when taxidermy, through the offices of the Guild, has put its house in order. Sure, there are bad hats who'll slaughter sparrowhawks so that they can mount them – but such crimes are rare. They are also *unnecessary*: a taxidermist does not have to step outside the law to obtain specimens. There are road casualties, 70 million road casualties each year. Did I know there were 70 million road casualties a year? No I didn't but I do now. I guess I heard *road casualties* about every ten minutes (during which span another 1500 birds had supposedly met their deaths, and foxes, and squirrels. As I say, these are the figures I was recurrently given. But such figures, so crucial to taxidermy's conscience, no doubt propagate themselves, multiply in exonerative leaps).

Museum taxidermists will tell you that whatever crimes against protected species are perpetrated they are the work of commercial practitioners. They will also tell you that those who are in business for themselves and thus unsalaried have to work against the clock to make ends meet. The inevitable outcome is shoddiness and a reliance on off-the-peg fibreglass casts which have only to be covered with the skin of the particular road casualty that has come your way. A room at York was given over to a sort of trade fair. These fibreglass casts were piled in foetal abandon. Enough glass eyes to supply a blind home gaped from display trays. An ad-hoc fleshing machine, for removing interconnecting tissue and fat from skins, sat on the floor. A number of didactic manuals lay on a table. It was as if one had been presented with the kit of parts and tools and instructions for the assembly of an unfabulous monster. You begin to realize just how difficult taxidermy is. At the same time you're left in no doubt that the proficient

hack could (indeed does) turn out mediocre generalized specimens at quite a rate: taxidermy has its attractions as a way of making a living as well as a sort of vocation.

It's very likely a further signal of the north/south divide that in the north, each month, one amateur taxidermist turns pro. The Guild's current chairman, James Dickinson, rues this tiny side effect of mass unemployment and fears that the standards which he has played a large part in raising (he's a consistent winner of competitions) will be undermined. That the same doesn't occur in the south is not *merely* a reflection of economic prowess: after all, the Medway towns are about as straitened as Tyneside. The fact is that taxidermy thrives, and always has, in the north. One might posit any number of reasons for this but two seem paramount: the tinkering in sheds, workshop tradition combined with a large population's proximity to and awareness of wilderness – in many of the towns and cities of Lancashire and Yorkshire the presence of the countryside is unavoidable. Tongues of country reach into the towns, fells too steep to build on are juxtaposed with factories and terraces and high rises. Division between town and country is not total. Town children grow up with a greater knowledge of birds and beasts than they might elsewhere – and of course there are many more town children than there are country children who enjoy the same advantages.

Given the preponderance of commercial taxidermists (and of would-be ones) in the north it is astonishing that prices there are fairly low. For some incomprehensible reason – incomprehensible to those who benefit, and to those who look on enviously from elsewhere – the area where taxidermy is most sought after is East Anglia. And it was for a farmer at Metfield in Suffolk that Emily Mayer mounted the Berkshire-cross boar's head that won the prize as Best of The Show. In a ceremony of striking informality Mr Dickinson appended Ms Mayer with a rosette – when I say striking informality I mean late and chaotic.

Did I, someone asked nervously, think that the striking informality of this and many other of the arrangements let down the trade? Far from it, I replied truthfully. What impressed me was not the quality of the lapel badges or the

promptness of the speakers but the knowledge of and enthusiasm for the work everyone I spoke to displayed. That, and the youth of so many taxidermists, people who are going to go on getting better, who have already attained a real mastery and yet have most of their lives ahead of them. And above all that the sheer imaginative power and technical brio on display. As Ian Hutchison of the Natural History Museum said more than once to me over his half of shandy: 'It speaks for itself this stuff.'

1986

Mane Man: Leonard The Crimper

Leonard, who is Leonard of Mayfair Ltd to the Revenue and Mister Leonard to his staff and Len to no one and Lenny – I suspect – to those who knew him back in W12 when he had the barrow, used to be Leonard Lewis on the dotted line but now he's Leonard Leonard. It's a deed poll job, an elective duplication, a willed echo. Leonard's not quite sure though just why he sloughed his patronym; (it's not like when you ask him if he was ever Len. '*Len*,' Leonard whispers, incredulous, seeking the insult, as though you'd suggested he bought his loafers at Dolcis, 'no, don't think so.') My ideas on this name change are: a) That it's a nominal confirmation of Leonard's habitual perception of himself – wherever he looks he sees himself in duplicate, triplicate, multiplicate (though he could hardly have called himself Leonard Leonard Leonard). b) That it dignifies the one handle moniker, and officially establishes him in the pantheon of the monomial along with Michelangelo, Pele, Saki, Taki, Dani, Arletty, Fernandel, Zouzou, Balthus and more cabaret artistes and cartoonists than I can think of. Idea b) is the better one; it's certainly better than idea c), which is that Leonard wishes to ape Humbert Humbert who, poor fellow, started life in his author's brain as Lambert Lambert – it was the doubleness that Nabokov saw as possessing a terrible ambiguity, though it was the vague homophony of Humbert and *ombre* that decided him on that name. That's the lit bit, let's crimp.

Leonard's cutting action is as studied as his name – this is no deprecation, we don't abhor artifice in performers. When Leonard combs his comb-hand is tense, and those fingers not gripping the Leonard-embossed instrument are cocked and splayed like those of a genteel tea drinker or engrossed

musician; he's light on his loafered feet (7½?) but stays this side of dance routines; he murmurs to his clients, now and again hitting high notes like a boy whose voice has not yet settled into man-tone. 'I can't bear my hair too long,' a paper-faced old lady tells him, 'but then I don't have much hair.' Leonard's hands tell her otherwise; they make moulding gestures around the meagre, wintry ration she still owns, they suspend themselves above her shoulders, cupped and indicative of an illusory mass, inviting her to make believe. What he does to this really unpromising raw material is to hew it into a rock-revival streamline, Bobby Vee rather than Gene Vincent, lots of upsweep, modest quiff, nothing wild. Now, the smile Leonard does when he's finished is quite something. It is also invariable and peculiar to this part of the act. Leonard's muscly assistant André hands him an oblong mirror to hold behind the punter's new head. Leonard waits till the ash streams that cover the occiput have been properly clocked then promotes upon his face The Smile – a sumptuous creation that instructs the punter to admire her self, his craft, her good taste in patronizing him; further, it allows her to see just how pleased he is with his results, how he couldn't have done it without her, how he depends on her. It lets her glimpse his post-coifal pleasure in her. Of course, this device is so flattering to the punter that it is an insurance against castigation should she not appreciate what has been done to her; when a famous hairdresser is telling you that you are the sole object of his attention, that you are for this moment quite, quite beautiful (in your own special way, you understand) you've got to have a lot of gall to reply that it's not really what you'd had in mind. I guess that once upon a time Leonard taught himself this smile, forced his facial muscles into this configuration; now he is so practised at it that it has the apparent ease of any act of virtuosity. The Smile is one of the big ingredients in Leonard's success, but it's hardly enough to explain the whole works.

It doesn't explain why Leonard is here on this prime chunk of the greedy Duke of Westminster's London, so close to the US embassy that he must have been able to hear the screams of protest-kids throwing themselves beneath police horses; it

doesn't explain why he's so big that he owns 500 square feet of mirror, 40 blow driers (with a working life of about three months each), six hood driers at £400 a throw, 26 dressing-out units, four shampoo units; why he's so busy that he employs ten stylists, seven apprentices, four tinters, two beauty therapists, three manicurists, a girl who attaches acrylic nails, three receptionists, a cloakroom lady, a PA. It doesn't explain all the Leonard tonics and Leonard shampoos and Leonard creams and Leonard concessions (Intercontinental Hotel, Britannia Hotel, St James's Club in Antigua). It takes more than a smile to arrive at the top of the tree in an unhealthy trade (97% of human heads transmit skin germs, 10% harbour the grape-shaped bacteria called staphylococci, 2% carry flu) which is competitive (27,000 salons in GB and 140,000 hairdressers) and poorly rewarded (the earnings of hairdressers are the lowest recorded in official statistics according to the Low Pay Unit). No, a smile, even The Smile isn't the answer. And no, Leonard's own analyses of his eminence do not give the answer: 'You've got to have the Wham, the Duran Duran' – the definite articles are Leonard's – 'you can't rely on Lady Ponsonby or the Duchess of Dowager . . . If I knew what the secret was everyone would know it, the guy in Putney would know it.' (Leonard once sold secondhand cars in that suburb).

'How did you start?'

'I was a mistake. My parents were old. My sister brought me up, she's 66. Nice woman, lives in Roehampton. Council flat.' He has a nephew who's almost the same age as he is (45, he says). He had a barrow in Shepherd's Bush market when he was '10 or 12'; a few days later it was when he was 14. He *is* imprecise about age. Then there was the Putney interlude. Then an apprenticeship with Evansky. Then a job with Vidal Sassoon.

'Were you working there when he became famous?'

'We get along very well.'

So I can't tell you what he learned in the way of self-promotion from the diet-obsessed young meteor, new aristocrat and herald of the 'classless' society. Nor can I tell you

what happened to one Raphael with whom he went into partnership in Duke Street.

'He just disappeared.'

'What d'you mean?'

'He just disappeared. His weakness was women and people like that.'

Leonard moved to Upper Grosvenor Street.

'And then it became the legend.'

'?'

'All the top hairdressers have been trained by me. D'you know Peter Morton?'

'He's not a hairdresser.'

'I call him Mandingo, God's Gift To The Working Woman. D'you know Brian Morrison?'

'Hairdresser?'

'*No.* Records. Record producer. The Wham. George Michael wanted more lights in his hair this morning and then there was Lady Osborne talking about her dog and I've still got to find the face of '85.'

'You trained Daniel Galvin . . .'

'A *tinter.*'

Now, here's a clue. Leonard is pre-eminently a *cutter.* And, to judge by his tone, a cutter is higher in caste than a tinter. Leonard evidently disapproves of tinters' excesses ('I said to Xandra you shouldn't do that to your hair . . . she does it herself, she just *wears* it'), he evidently dislikes the striving gimmickry of high fashion, knows very well that mainstream elegance is more beguiling – and more profitable – than a gill of KrazyKolor poured over a half-shaven crown. He seems good at gauging the conservatism and conformity of his clients whilst hinting to them that they're anything but conservative and conformist. And there's nothing of course more conformist than a successful pop group, hence his happiness to be involved with the Duran Duran ('They're not fools, they've got million pound houses') and Boy George whose *gemütlich* coyness is the very stuff of joke suburbia, Penge and the rest. This is probably called packaging by association. In Leonard of Mayfair Ltd women arrive in the first floor salon from the shampoo room upstairs soaking, bedraggled, wrapped in

towels like refugees from a shipwreck who find themselves in a cocoon that is comforting, cosy, commonsensical, thick with unmalicious (and thus disappointing) gossip, and the manicurist's recipe for apple crumble, and doggy talk. I suppose this is what people want when they are rescued, a confirmation of the eternal triviality of things. A service is being provided. And even when the salon is a mill of Miss World competitors and photographers from the mammillary dailies everything is still nice and snug. The girls don't scratch each other's eyes out, don't mutter imprecations at each other – far from it, they seem to be promiscuously fond of each other, maybe because they all possess exaggerated, cartoon-like figures and physiognomies. There is a certain freakishness on display; I mean, the one with the high cheekbones has unbelievably high cheekbones that will one day meet her brow and blind her, the one with the pout has lips like twin testes with a weight problem dressed in red satin, the one with the hourglass shape has been moulded from Dermalike by Allen Jones. And this hyperbolic mean extends to what gallantry demands we call their personalities – the one with no conversation, notionally Anglophone, has a vocabulary of maybe fifty words. Those who do talk, talk shop. National costumes (Miss Australia is going to be wearing one shaped like a boomerang), the fickleness of judges, beauty tips, other contests. It's all numbingly twee; there's even something hearth-and-slippers about the bandit-moustached photographer who advises me to 'Get down the betting shop sharpish, Kenya's a cracker and she's 66–1 and on the QT I've had five each way on Ireland, five on Venezuela and two on Canada – she's lovely, Princess Di look-alike. Lovely.' Predictably Miss Canada was a Luck and Flaw model of the Princess of Wales's father. The combination of run of the mill exoticism in appearance and desperately ordinary mentation and aspirations characterizes the upper echelons of crimpery. (Things just aren't like Joe Orton and Kenneth Halliwell's *The Boy Hairdresser*.) Leonard must be partly responsible for this world, but he's not actually of it; he's a kind of king in it and no more liable to abide by its laws than the Queen is to pay taxes. Thus he himself has a hairdo which doesn't mark him as a hairdresser: some of his staff are

currently carrying on their heads neo-Kneller mountains in full Vanbrughian baroque, like the Kit-Kat Club drunk on lacquer – when I cite Vanbrugh I mean to recall the pedimented masses of his buildings *and* the megaperruques of his plays. This is hairdressers' hairdressing and demands the faint praise granted to writers' writers, architects' architects etc., i.e. it's inbred, 'interesting', and unliable to catch on. If this lot go off and set up like the rest of Leonard's former pupils (John Frieda, Michaeljohn, Celine, the tinter Galvin, Keith at Smile) their success will be short, probably. Leonard's own hair appears to be in good nick, and its cut (not overneat and with signs of compromise on the sideburn issue) is pretty standard 'creative' adman. His dress is kindred: Oxford cotton shirts with collar pins, flannels with a faint Lionel, V-necks in knitted silk/cotton (I think), macs with trad straps, designer leather jackets. It's a vaguely Italianate version of preppy. Clothes like this will take you into places you can't go if you're wearing leather trousers and have hair shaped like an agricultural instrument. You can do deals if you look like this, greys don't mind you. You have a foot in Mammon's camp and another in Sartor's. You're the acceptable face of hair.

On the other hand, while those crimpers who ape Lord Foppington or Mr Hyde can chat only about tea cups (*'so* fifties') and the work of Andrew Logan, Leonard has a canny turn of mind and is socially fully formed. He doesn't take refuge from his emotions in sentimentality; he doesn't take refuge from kulchur in kitsch. His snobbery, so far as it goes, is based on an order, a hierarchy, of his own devising; this is not, of course, an invariable characteristic of the self-made – these islands are again rotten with people who love lords, who dissemble their origins, whose aspirations are hideous in their lack of imagination, whose own judgement (should they have any) scares them. Leonard follows his own hunches, even if this does involve him in dropping names I haven't heard of; which makes for a certain failure as a name dropper. You need to know your target in that game. Leonard missed badly with the aforesaid Brian Morrison, with Peter Beard, with Nick Rhodes (since revealed as one of the Duran Duran). And I think I know as much about Jack Nicholson as I want. And

I've spent *an entire night* with the formerly satyromaniac snapper Bailey – two beds, very chaste, sorry. And models turned actresses aren't quite my thing – I'm not really sure that they're Leonard's either. He's that odd, but quite recognizable creature, the enforcedly gregarious loner whose real loyalties and affections are to his roots – he seems most comfortable, is certainly most voluble with those whose background is akin to his; he's at home with working-class boys who got on through talent or luck or yob zeal, who've grown into men doing OK in the posher service trades – hotels, bars, catering, entertainment. He's more comfortable with, say, the greeter at Harry's Bar (the Mayfair one) than with the tensely smug execs who patronize it – Leonard's different from you lot because the only person who can fire Leonard is Leonard. Leonard is a born boss even if he's not a born Leonard Leonard; he must have been a nightmarish employee – tell me, Sassoon. Sassoon could, natch, tell me what Leonard's really got. Sassoon would go very Californian on this one; perm any one frond – the meaning of capillary, *so* into, he *feels* hair, the texture and the weight and the sheen. Right on, but what Leonard's really got is not being like a hairdresser. This rashly supposes that there is such a thing as a stereotypical hairdresser; well, the fact is the closer you get to them the better founded seem your preconceptions. They *do* adhere if not to type then to a gamut of types. Leonard has the advantage of lacking the usual characteristics. This is probably attributable to one part will and three parts luck in the genetic dip; in a very conformist trade he's a bit of an oddball. Perhaps there are, among those he's trained since the legend started, the apes of Leonard; perhaps Frieda and Galvin the tinter and the rest made out by sussing that Leonard's secret was essentially omissive: he *isn't* camp, he *doesn't* confide in his clients (the days of vice-versa seem long gone – nowadays one of the many hazards attendant on a toop trip is the hearing of the cutter's confession. You're the one getting his biretta trimmed, they're the ones snipping for absolution). Also, he evinces no wish to *mutilate*, he keeps well this side of Dachau.

Leonard is laddish; I don't mean that he's blokeish (lager advertisements, Chas 'n' Dave, the ineffable Benny Green).

What I mean is that he's left lager behind, that now he drinks vodka and bouillon ('Bullshots' if you must); that he's also dumped on the male chauvinism (abuse born of fear) that the working class is prone to; that Willie Landels, an Italo-Caledonian exotic and epicure, got it right when he called Leonard 'thior chikhir charmpu borgh froh Sheerparze Bouche'. He's at his most laddish, as I say, with people like him, like the photographer Clive Arrowsmith. Arrowsmith activates Leonard, who has a certain donnée for reaction. When Leonard scores one for telling you his 'fifty-foot lounge' is in a flat in the same block as My Lord Weidenfeld's you try to score two with: 'Does he invite you to his parties?' And he bends one round the wall with: 'Yeh . . . But why don't you ask if I ever ask *him* to *my* parties?'

When you ask Leonard if he *minds* working for J. Walter Thompson (Indonesia) and Sunsilk (Jakarta) he shrugs off your incredulity with: 'Look, Clive gets £1400 for this. He needs me.' Mr Arrowsmith makes it clear that we're talking here about £1400 per day. Leonard, whose whack, you can be sure, doesn't come out of Clive's whack, not only does the models' hair but shows the hand model how to hold the comb that plunges into the Leonarded locks. But what is really astonishing is not the bread these guys can order but Leonard's extraordinary feat in reproducing a hairdo. What I was witness to was a re-shoot. Sunsilk (Jakarta) had decreed that the original model's hands were a teeny weeny mite too dark – just as we all want to look tanned, they want to look, well, lightish. Hence the new hand models at only £135 a time – these are people who are not paid for their brains. But Sunsilk (Jakarta) had liked the toop in the first shoot and wanted Leonard to do its double. He did. It was like seeing an actor do a soliloquy with every phrase, movement, tone, breath, and hunk of weight on a word just like in the last take. What Leonard did to this bimbo's hair was exactly what he did for the initial session – coaxed it to ad perfection, the same ad perfection as in Arrowsmith's original photos. This was real craft. None of the products involved in this deft act was Sunsilk, needless to say – but, after all, what is being sold here is merely an illusion. It wouldn't do to be too literal.

This sort of work is bread and butter stuff. There's not the kudos of films here – Leonard did *Barry Lyndon* and *Bounty* ('I saved them a lot of money'). Nor is there any salon chat; Leonard's method is markedly more functional – at one moment he hauled back the model's head with the brush that was caught in her hair and it recalled for a second a recondite sexual act. Sessions like these are about the only times that Leonard cuts without bothering to sell himself; the rest of the time he's on stage or, rather, he's like a store demonstrator. The lack of audience, albeit an audience of one, promotes relaxation; he hardly bothers to dissemble his ennui. When hair means nothing but a jumbo fee it ceases apparently to hold such allure for him, and his spiel – his pious spiel, I'd have thought – about loving his salon, adoring his clients, giving a service and all that seems actually to approximate to some sort of truth.

1985

A Window Dresser's Window Dresser

Derek Kemp as been described by Carl 'Bobby' Franklyn as 'arguably the most exciting talent to emerge in British window dressing since Hughie Dennison'. This is no mean praise. Carl 'Bobby' Franklyn is at 66 the doyen of British window dressers and Hughie Dennison is a legend in the business, the man who is said, in the 1960s, to have done for window dressing what Bailey and Duffy did for photography, what Best did for footballers and El Cordobes did for matadors. Dennison brought what 'Bobby' calls a 'very farouche vigour' to the art. Stencilled tea chests, pneumatic drills, tractor tyres, work boots, leather aprons, straw, breeze blocks, lumps of anthracite – these are the sort of thing that you never saw in a Bond Street window till Dennison put them there. The rusting motorcycle and bales of barbed wire that he displayed in a Wigmore Street bedding shop in 1965 were, says 'Bobby' Franklyn, 'arguably a breakthrough comparable with the Peter Hall/David Warner *Hamlet* of that year. It was a window for the age. A window that caught the spirit of rebelliousness that was in the air. A window that anticipated and – who knows – perhaps even set in motion the student protest movement.'

Dennison now works mainly in the USA where the increasing abstraction of his work has caused him to be hailed by Arthur Weinburg, Reader in Display Structures at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, as 'the first window artist to achieve nihilism in four dimensions'. Weinburg would, one suspects, be less impressed by Derek Kemp. For, as 'Bobby' Franklyn observes, 'Derek's virtues are traditional.' Kemp is a realist who cites the American 'super realist' sculptor Duane Hanson as the main influence on his work. He first saw Hanson's deliberately banal and extraordinarily lifelike figures

at the Serpentine Gallery in 1973, soon after he had left St Martin's School of Art where he had, by his own admission, spent most of his time 'welding bits of girders to one another'. Hanson's illusionism and verisimilitude made him question what he was doing and opened his eyes to the tradition of representational sculpture that had flourished from the Renaissance till the first quarter of this century. 'Look', says Kemp, 'if Michelangelo or Bernini were alive today they would be window dressers. That's all they could do. The art establishment just isn't into sculpture that looks *like* something. They're still into piles of bricks and lumps of shit. You know – concepts and that. I admire the skill of the craft of the old masters. All those berks who teach at art schools are pathetic – they dismiss it out of hand, anything representational.'

It is because of his admiration for structures like the Albert Memorial and for the sort of *public* sculpture that is to be found especially in those parks and gardens laid out in the 19th Century (of which there are many in his native West Riding) that he went into window dressing. 'The whole gallery scene is tied up with private art. I want people to see my stuff even if they don't know who's done it. I don't want it just to be seen by a few people and then locked away in someone's house.' One of his first commissions was for a shoe shop in South Molton Street. He made a fibreglass figure of a kneeling woman without shoes on and called it 'Window Dresser'. He surrounded the figure with the tools of her trade (scissors, tape, staplers etc) and with shoes and shoe-boxes, with a half-eaten ham sandwich, a cup of coffee in a plastic cup and a pack of Gitanes (the brand which Hughie Dennison had made *de rigueur* among window dressers of Kemp's generation).

'You always see lots of people stopping to look at window dressers, like the way crowds always gather if there's a film crew in the street. So you had all these people stopping thinking they were going to see the *act* of window dressing.' Kemp continued in this illusionistic vein with another figure of a woman; this one was white-overalled and middle-aged and was stretching towards a hot water bottle in the window of a Sloane Street chemist's. It was as though she was getting

it for an unseen customer within the shop which, you might have presumed, had run out of that make of bottle (Thermo-snug) necessitating the sale of the display item. It was not adjudged a success. The shop's sales of hot water bottles slumped from 12.6 per week to a meagre 2.8; and sales of shower caps and loofahs decreased alarmingly too. It does not take an external degree from North East London Polytechnic to discern the link here – Kemp's display was circuitously indicative of a shortage of water. On the other hand this was the summer of 1976 and it seems likely that very few people would have wanted to buy hot water bottles anyway. But what about the shower caps and loofahs. The result of this was of course a *cause célèbre*. SLOANE PHARMACY FIASCO screamed the headline in *Window World*, provoking 'Bobby' Franklyn's now famous letter to that paper, beginning: 'Anyone who cares about window dressing . . .'

Kemp remembers it vividly. 'Honestly, half the business ostracized me. I mean, the politics of window dressing is something else. It's like Machiavelli . . .' Two top window dressers' clubs made it clear to him that he was *persona non grata* and for some time he found work hard to come by. 'Bobby' Franklyn championed him in print and on the lecture tour he made of Australia in the winter of 76–77. The call from Australia was not slow in coming. 'They're so much more adventurous. They really *feel* displays.' For a while Kemp was the toast of Sydney window dressing circles. His work for David Jones, Merrivale and the Sportsgirl chain attracted wide attention and he became a valued guest at North Shore and Peninsula parties and a well known figure in King's Cross restaurants and clubs. Then, 'as a favour' (he recalls), he did a sports shop near the famous Hill cricket ground. He put a man wearing a shirt, tie, ordinary slacks and one cricket pad in the window. This figure was furtively picking up a cherrybright ball from the obviously fake grass. It was as if one of the salesmen, indulging in a knockabout game in the yard behind the shop had emulated Bradman or Chappell and hit the ball so hard it was lost and was having to fetch a new one.

The Confederation of Retail Operatives and Allied Trades' media officer Graeme Rodney was called in by a shop assistant

and was outraged by what he saw. 'This display,' he said in an interview to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'is nothing short of disgusting, it is a calculated insult to members of CROAT. It suggests – no, I'll go further – it states forthrightly and unequivocally that retail operatives spend their working days skiving off, going awol, taking French leave out the back of the point of sale, abandoning their posts, neglecting the interests of both their employers and their customers. It is a disgrace and I regard it as a deliberate provocation to industrial action.'

Worse was to follow, Kemp says that Graeme Rodney's statement 'politicized me and made me go over the top.' Asked by the newspaper for his comments Kemp was thoroughly injudicious. The subsequent headline, CROATS SUCK SAYS ARTISTIC POM WINDOW DRESSER, caused Kemp to be blacked by the union. It was also noticed by the leader of a party of visiting Yugoslav agronomists, Deyan Djokic, who (ignorant of the trade union's acronym but – thanks to brother Ivan, a Brisbane short order cook – a master of Australian argot) felt that his country, his forefathers and his pride were being spat upon: 'They are being spat upon,' he informed the Yugoslav embassy. The British stand at Vitrex 78 in Basle was boycotted by Yugoslavia (which caused it to receive unprecedented praise in the window dressing pages of *Tass*) and in 1980 Kemp was refused accreditation for the 1980 Belgrade Triennale which is to window dressing what Cannes is to cinema or Ghent to double-glazing. (The Balkan countries have a long tradition of fine window dressing and both King Peter of Yugoslavia and King Zog of Albania took an active interest. Indeed, according to his wife Geraldine, Zog used often to say that had he not wanted to be an engine driver he would have wanted to be a window dresser.)

Kemp made an ignominious return from Australia. For a few months he helped at his father's fish and chip shop in the Leeds suburb of Roundhay. He became fascinated by the potential of lard as a sculptured medium. 'Pork's better than beef but Dad wouldn't have it in the shop because of the kosher custom. Still, you can do quite a bit with a half a hundredweight of refined beef lard. It doesn't take the knife

as nicely as pork but it's more, well, tough, virile. You know what I mean. I mean it's rougher. It's very *sweatshirt*, like.' His exhibition of lard-sculpts at the Otley Arts Festival (jointly sponsored by The Beef Information Council and the Wharfedale Arts Association) was a dismal failure. A bovine revenge was taken. Two bulls, cognisant no doubt of the fate suffered by the rendered fat of their cousins, broke out of a field near Pool and wandered irately into the path of a tannery's lorry driven by a Mr Haig, who swerved and demolished a temporary pylon thus depriving Otley of electricity for three hours. At the Wharfedale Hospital in that town a man whose veins were clogged with dairy products 'died' during the minute between his life-support machine's going off and the emergency generator's coming on. ('It's like being on holiday,' he said. He did not qualify this observation before he actually died 10 days later. 'We always went on holiday to Robin Hood's Bay,' his wife said.) At the former Unitarian Chapel, now the Arts Centre, disaster struck. The refrigerated display unit (upon which Derek Kemp's representation of the footplate of the A-4 Pacific Mallard driven by Mr Doddington setting the world speed record for a steam train was situated) had no resort to an emergency generator. Mr Doddington's LNER cap was the first thing to melt; it was followed by some of the fiddly bits – gauges, faucets, pipes, valves and so on. Kemp was in tears by this time and the floor was unctuous with dripping. And when Mr Doddington's stout trunk slid away amidst the shouts and moans of regional arts officers decrying the philistinism of the electricity board Kemp resolved never again to work in lard.

He went away to forget. He taught night school in Malmö. He was appointed official photographer to a firm of wedding caterers in Helsinki. He took up canoeing. In Os, south of Bergen, he studied scagliola and marbling under a man who had learned the arts as a prisoner of war. In Oslo he decorated the city's only Ukrainian restaurant. On a Baltic ferry between Hälsingborg and Helsingör he at last forgot.

He came back to London with an enthusiasm that has been well rewarded. On his way home from a weekend winter break in Dawlish 'Bobby' Franklyn found himself sharing a

train compartment with a secondhand book dealer whose shop window, 'Bobby' discovered when he subsequently visited him, was 'a blob of monotony – just books, no excitement'. Kemp was summoned and has given West Kensington what must be the most arrestingly novel display it has ever seen. In the window of the shop he has put a crouched bookish figure (the sort that haunts public library reading rooms, that eats alone with a book in front of him, that has no sense of dress or appearance, that seeks long forgotten authors to read rather than to collect). The image is a potent one. The eager glare suggests the happy discovery of a long sought book; the position of the extraordinarily lifelike figure suggests absorption in it. The message is clear – it is that this bookshop is a trove of untold delights. The secondary message is that the shop is tolerant and indulgent of the distrait customer who climbs into the window and spends half a day there (and, therefore, of all customers). It has been an unmitigated success. The shop's sales have increased, the owner has been commended by two local amenity groups and a party of toy librarians from Northamptonshire chartered a minibus in order to come to London to see it.

Kemp is now back in business in a big way. He has formed a company called Artful Effort, has studios in Clerkenwell, an enviable list of clients, a growing reputation. He is now doing exhibitions and fashion shows and has recently been approached by a major theatre company. 'I'd love to do a musical,' he says. However, so far as window dressers everywhere are concerned perhaps the really big news is that he has lured 'Bobby' Franklyn out of his near retirement and even now they are working together on a secret project for what 'Bobby' intriguingly describes as 'a major store'. After that, what next? Could Kemp be the man to bring back Hughie Dennison from the States? Could he, as 'Bobby' Franklyn likes to think he might, be the first window dresser to become a television personality? For Derek Kemp, at this moment, anything looks possible.

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1982

The Man Who Knew Everyone: Christopher Gibbs

The wheels of 'classlessness' – that phenomenon of social mobility when the ladder itself was in a state of permanent mutation, a state that lasted for about a dozen years until the mid-Seventies when once again the rungs were set in concrete – the wheels of classlessness were initially oiled by those who had begun near the top and saw that far from repulsing those who were creating a parallel élite ('the new aristocracy') everything would be democratically hunky-dory and much more financially attractive if the newcomers were embraced.

This was not slumming the way that Nancy Cunard had slummed before or that Jamie Blandford was to slum after – both these were cases of the high-born throwing their souls and fortunes at scum-of-the-earth opiate brokers, men of all sexes with dental caries and horrible friends. No, Christopher Gibbs didn't act that way at all. He belongs to perhaps the only generation of recent times (b.1938) whose upper class was forced into collusive contact with its lower middle class, the generation that suffered National Service. It would be going too far to attribute the social funfair of the Sixties to the collective skivery of former national servicemen. But there can be no doubt that an Etonian of Gibbs's vintage would be more amenable towards the suburban lower middle classes from Dartford, say, than would today's Etonian. The Dartfordian is today far more foreign than he was 25 years ago. Once again he knows his place – cheering a motion advocating the reintroduction of the death penalty at a Tory weekend seminar. Things have changed.

In March 1965 the Rolling Stones (natives of Dartford, Beckenham etc) had their first brush with the law. Encouraged by their then manager Andrew Oldham they urinated on

the forecourt of a service station – 'We piss anywhere, man.' Oldham was a minor public schoolboy (Wellingborough) whose hunch that 'rebellion' was a money-spinner had, famously, proved right. But his idea of 'rebellion' was limited to a mix of overt sexuality and inane loutishness. By 12 February 1967, when they were busted for drugs at Keith Richard's house (Gibbs was there but wasn't charged), they had graduated from posing as Neanderthal oiks to acting like dandiacally perverse exquisites.

Their tutors in preciousness had been Tara Browne (car crash – he didn't notice that the lights had changed), Robert Fraser (AIDS) and Christopher Gibbs (alive, thriving). Jones (waterlogged), then Jagger and Richard, were more profoundly influenced by this trio than by the rock 'n' rollers they'd previously frequented. They were taken up just as Edwardian chorus girls had been. They were schooled in worldliness by Etonians just that bit older than they were, Etonians who were old enough to have experienced Chelsea when the cult of the upper-class con man (prop. Robin Cook, sometime acquaintance) was at its height. Gibbs represented a seductive mix of androgyny, scholarship, recondite pursuits (carpets, reading), and, most of all, taste. The demonic side of the Stones when they were at their height in the late Sixties is at least partly attributable to this milieu: the world of Kenneth Anger, magic (not necessarily white) and acid. Gibbs also had connections – real money, people who didn't bother to pretend to drop their aitches, the bit where minor art rubs up against major society and is called Cecil Beaton (heart attack), museum people, people from the rooms, Tangier people, people who'd been outrageous in the blackout. Rock 'n' roll is a small parish. Gibbs was properly metropolitan.

It worked both ways. Gibbs and people like Michael Rainey (now a supervisor on the Sydney phone exchange) and Mark Palmer were attracted by the glamour and fortunes of the Stones, these ignoble savages who pissed anywhere. The glamour may have rubbed off on them. Now that rock 'n' roll has had a further two decades to become formulaic and institutionalized, it is easy to forget just how dangerous and raw and farouche Dartford's best seemed in those days, just

how important it all seemed (and perhaps was). And when they were poured into velvet like polychrome Brummells (striped velvet from Rainey's Hung On You and from Dandy Fashions) they were even more dangerous. And give them (well, sell them) houses and antiques and tapestries and let them act like younger sons and the arrogance gets devilish. It was Gibbs who arranged the selling. He found Stargroves for Jagger. A house in proper, non-suburban Berkshire, not in Weybridge or Windsor; an old (nineteenth-century) house, not mock Georgian or Sunningdale Tudor. Through Gibbs, Jagger had learned to leapfrog those showbiz hurdles. And when Gibbs had found the house he filled it with furniture. Gibbs also found – for a fee of £1,000 – Prince Rupert Loewenstein to advise first Jagger then all the band on their money and effectively manage them. Loewenstein had a bit more cachet, it must be understood, than Alan Klein who, apart from his enterprising peculations, had the problem of looking like some sort of meat-axe operative from a Midwest stockyard. Loewenstein had the best sort of title – one that was reasonably kosher and which no one knew too much about . . . just how royal was he? His title is a Bavarian one. This was apt for Jagger who was vaulting into a different world, one where no rock singer had been before. By this time Brian Jones, too, had vaulted into a different world. He could be regarded as one of Gibbs's failures, but then 'he lacked *fond*,' says Gibbs, who speaks with the same fastidiousness that characterizes his prose, which is eternally lapidary and thick with 'Georgian' mannerisms; Gibbs will use 'panic' as an adjective – in speech, with a precise and anachronistic correctitude – to mean 'pertaining to Pan'. Jones certainly lacked Gibbs's staying power, and the toughness to cope with the reverses that life (an armed hooligan) is liable to throw at one. Jones also lacked money – he died in debt and most of the hire-purchased furniture in his house was removed immediately after his death by unknown hands.

Gibbs has suffered some reverses but he got where he is today by coming from behind, time and again. As a child he suffered polio. He left Eton prematurely – he had started as he intended to continue. He had to suffer at the hands of his

large family, a pretty straight family (banking, land). After Eton he was dispatched to a dismal crammer called Stanbridge, and then to a course for foreign students in Tours – almost like a remittance man. Here he began to learn about wine and about the civilizing influence of gastronomy. But he had already made what was to be the key friendship of his life, Simon Sainsbury. In his late teens and early twenties, after a brief period of National Service (curtailed on medical grounds), he hung about Chelsea and Camden Passage with the likes of Mark Sykes and set up his first shop near Chelsea Green. No one quite understood how he had so much money.

The fact of the matter is that he is bankrolled by Simon Sainsbury. Gibbs possesses a famously good eye – his shop in Kasmin's old premises is a sensual treat (its objects, stylistically and culturally heterogeneous, are linked by nothing more than Gibbs's say-so, his imprimatur – the same might be said of his friends and acquaintances); further, he is a man of genuine charm, though it's boyish, vulnerable charm, the sort of charm you might count on in a middle-aged man who still answers to the diminutive of Chrissie. But this is not enough, and nor is resolve, nor is an address book which displays an extraordinary range of contacts. It is what Gibbs *lacks* that makes him as a dealer. He lacks a cashflow problem. Most dealers, even grand dealers, possess insufficient capital to be able to hang on to stock indefinitely. If you buy a lump of something by Kent, say, for £x,000 or £x0,000 (add noughts to taste and to get the point) you're going to have to shift it soonish in order to free the cash to enable you to go on buying. This means you shift it for a profit that is no more than averagely greedy. Because of Sainsbury's financial underwriting of his enterprise Gibbs can hang on to stuff for years, till it has sizeably appreciated, till the ideal punter presents itself. Profits tend to the large size.

If Sainsbury is one enduring contact who makes Gibbs so powerful a figure the other is John Paul Getty. They were neighbours in Cheyne Walk in the Sixties when Getty was married to Talitha Pol (heroin). In those days Gibbs was referred to as the King of Chelsea. The BBC filmed part of a documentary on Chelsea in his house and Antonioni used it

for the party scene in *Blow-Up*. He wrote articles about his fancies in *Vogue* and *Town*. He set the pace. He got short hair before anyone else. He wore a kaftan first, though in Marrakesh where both he and Getty had houses he wore a white linen suit. He had a mulberry tree in his Chelsea garden and would issue engraved summonses to tea. He held the quintessential party of 1967 there. Among those present: David Mlinaric, aka 'Monster', who spent a week in bed after the party; Hugh Reay, an Eton contemporary and now a Euro-MP; Mick Jagger and Marianne Faithfull – they ran up and down Cheyne Walk (where they too lived in a Gibbs-decorated house) to rid themselves of the effects of the overstrong hash brownies that Bill Levy had cooked without Gibbs's knowledge; a clutch of Guinnesses and Ormsby-Gores; several MPs who took themselves to Westminster Hospital to have their stomachs pumped; Allen Ginsberg who was jet-lagged as well as stoned; a clutch of King's Roadies – Nicky Kramer, Martin Sharp, Nigel Waymouth, David Litvinov. This last was a piece of very rough trade, the scion of a liberal Jewish Highgate family (his brothers are both novelists) with a terminal *nostalgie de la boue*. He frequented gangsters and got involved with a boyfriend of one of the Kray brothers. The twins didn't like this. They hung him up and slashed his jugular. He didn't die, but his throat needed 127 stitches. As a friend recalls: 'He had weird scars.' Litvinov was also dialogue and local colour adviser on *Performance*, whose sets were designed by Gibbs. Later he worked as caretaker of Davington Priory, the house at Faversham which Gibbs lived in through the Seventies. It was here that Litvinov succeeded where the Krays had failed; he topped himself on the premises. Gibbs then sold the house to Bob Geldof and Paula Yates. The go-between was Justin de Villeneuve. Gibbs, though, probably already knew Geldof who between Boomtown Rats and Live Aid earned a sort of living as an antiques dealer and was a familiar figure in the rooms.

After this 1967 party Gibbs took some of his guests to another party to meet Princess Margaret. One of them threw up on her car and another was so stoned he wouldn't stop shaking her hand. Cool breeze! Gibbs effectively linked people

who would otherwise never have known each other. He treads in different worlds with ease. He's very much his own chameleon.

The crossover between mutually exclusive milieux is not always a happy one, however, and friends in low places can be a trial. When Gibbs got into a dispute with a well-known balletomane, the latter took umbrage and sought revenge in a bitchily hurtful way – a way designed to harm Gibbs's social probity rather than the man himself. The balletomane simply rang Paddington police station and told the drugs squad that if they were to bust a certain house in Warwick Avenue they'd score a hit. The boys in blue set off and found themselves tramping over the sofas belonging to Lady Diana Cooper. She was of course 'clean', but the source of this inconvenience was evidently clear to her.

Certain acquaintances, a man of Gibbs's sensitivity obviously realized, were not to be hauled out for general consumption, even in so reckless an atmosphere as that which prevailed in the Sixties when a pet crim was de rigueur. Kenneth Anger, the remarkable maker of such films as *Kustom Kar Kommandos* and *Scorpio Rising*, homoerotic paeans to leather and chrome, and the author of *Hollywood Babylon*, was not too widely displayed by Gibbs. Of course he hung around with the Stones and succeeded in interesting them, as he had Gibbs, in the occult and diabolism, which became an essential facet of the Stones' act and being in the late Sixties. This is manifest on the *Beggar's Banquet* album whose title was thought up by Gibbs. Anger had other dealings with rock stars. He had a furious row with John Lennon whose killer Mark Chapman was, coincidentally, one of Anger's pupils in a film course he taught in Hawaii.

The conjunction of Gibbs – 'the last beautiful person' – and Getty, who is one of the richest men in the world, makes for a mostly beneficent force. It was Gibbs who secured Nicholas Johnson the job of architect to the Getty library. It was Gibbs who persuaded Getty to fork out the money that has saved a meadow beneath Ely Cathedral from development by the Dean and Chapter, thus preserving the view of that marvellous building from the east. But at the same time as he was acting

patently for the good in the Fens he was behaving in an unusual manner at Edward James's house, Monkton.

It is probably of no moment that Gibbs spent the afternoon of 12 February 1967 driving in convoy with Jagger, Richard, Fraser etc looking for Monkton, the Lutyens house that Edward James had inherited, had had altered by Kit Nicholson (glider accident) and had filled with the greatest and strangest collection of surrealist objects in Britain. They didn't find the house. That evening was when the police burst into Richard's house. It can't be a day that Gibbs remembers with fondness. But such a distant association cannot surely have prompted his actions of nineteen years later.

Gibbs is the first antique dealer to be appointed to a committee of the National Trust as an adviser on the 'arrangement' of houses. It is a weird appointment for the *possibility* of a conflict of interest is always there. And since, as a trustee of Monkton, he, with his fellow trustee Simon Sainsbury, counselled the break-up of that house's collection, the conflict of interest has become actual. Most of Gibbs's colleagues in the bitchy world of auction rooms and big money objets are aghast at his behaviour. 'I don't understand it,' says David Hicks. 'One doesn't want to knock him . . .' says another.

The thing is that Gibbs and Sainsbury not only rid the board of Monkton trustees of Noel Simon, who wished to keep the collection intact, but that Gibbs actually bought some pieces at the sale (managed by Sotheby's like a garden party) and now has them in his own gallery, whence they can be bought at a price. (The house itself has been bought by Virgin Records MD, Simon Draper.) Why was Gibbs prepared to see himself reviled? Was his action indeed prompted by that day nineteen years previously? Was it a wiping clean of the past? His drug-friendly rock 'n' occult youth must be a bit of an embarrassment now that he's such a staunch pillar of the art establishment. His professed attitude to the occult is now one of amused scepticism.

There can be no doubt that Gibbs is unrepentant about his rôle in the Monkton affair, a rôle in which he was no doubt rehearsed by Sainsbury. He is as patently honest as he is boyish. People use the word 'saintly' of him, presumably with

reference to his studied manner of beatific unworldliness – he has the air of a well-bred vicar, the sort that doesn't go in for prayer spaces and salsa masses: he is in fact a highish Anglican. He looks like the ideal of that flower of Englishness that died in Flanders. He is camera-friendly. He has a talent for having his photo taken. His angle on Monkton was that it was not worth preserving the remnants of an already partially dispersed collection: 'an awful lot of decorator's regency'. Thus, so far as he's concerned, there is little to repent. Nonetheless the gap between the man and the reputation he has gained over this business is a bit disquieting. The dislocation between the charm and the moral probity on the one hand and survival in the jungle of the rooms on the other begs some questions. Maybe the charm and the moral probity are the components of an oddball survival kit. Maybe they enable him to get away with a lot.

The generous thing to say of an apparently generous man apropos Monkton is that he suffered a lapse of taste. The suggestion that he is contaminated by the vulpine monetary tactics of the rock world he once frequented is probably ridiculous. Whatever he once was like he has cleaned up his act. Like everyone else in the late Eighties he wears a suit, wears it with zealous negligence. Like everyone else he's concerned about 'the environment' and is keen – not just out of selfish ends, for this is where his gallery is – that the hinterland of Bond Street around Avery Row and Brook's Mews should be spared the crass redevelopment that it is threatened with. Like practically no one else he lives in Albany and a manor house near Abingdon.

Twenty years ago he was one of the subjects of a book, by a 'style' writer, dubiously titled *Today There Are No Gentlemen*. Of course there *were* gentlemen, they just pretended otherwise. Now, today, son, they don't bother dissembling themselves. CG was and is one of them.

1987

The Queen of Tangiers: David Herbert

Henry Ford would have admired the notion if not the hue. Tangiers's houses are chromatically uniform. As if doing an aesthetic dictator's will the people paint them white. There is of course no such dictator, there's just the sun, and the fact that David Herbert's house is the colour of a crushed damson only goes to show that its author is prepared to ignore both decorative convention and climatic exigency in order to have what he wants. House and man are correspondently *sui generis*, they are mutually reflective, they illumine each other like artist and artifact. And this signal interdependence is not mitigated by David Herbert's being a collector rather than a primary creator: selection, when it is practised with this much discrimination is indubitably an art.

He has possessed neither the means nor, more importantly, the desire to acquire on a wholesale scale. The second son of the 15th Earl of Pembroke – his autobiography is so titled, *Second Son* (Peter Owen, London, 1972) – he is the product, *not* the victim, of primogeniture. He has turned the pecuniary limitations imposed on him to marked advantage: they have tended to concentrate his taste, which thus has distinct (if rather wayward) bounds which are pleasing in the way that the bounds of, say, realism are – greater satisfaction is to be derived from a convention which has its own internal discipline than from one where anything goes.

Wilton House, where David Herbert spent most of his childhood and much of his adult life up to his migration to Tangiers, is architecturally heterogeneous. Inigo Jones, John Webb, William Kent, William Chambers, Roger Morris, James Wyatt all worked there. Jones's state rooms, including the marvellous Double and Single Cube rooms, are unmatched in

Britain; they contain works by van Dyck, Luca Giordano, Chippendale. The place is an anthology of the finest work of the 17th and 18th centuries; it is an awesome and instructive place to grow up in, and David Herbert's acquisitive gift is in the tradition of his family's inspired patronage – for collecting is nothing, after all, if not secondary patronage. Shakespeare and Sir Philip Sidney frequented Wilton; again, David Herbert's friendships with some notable artists of this century can be seen to have familial precedents. Of these artists, souvenirs of whom constellate his Tangiers house (Augustus John, Rex Whistler, Noel Coward, Tallulah Bankhead, Paul Bowles, Truman Capote), none bore such influence on him as Cecil Beaton, a friend from the early 30s and a frequent visitor to Tangiers till his death half a century later.

'That's very interesting,' says David, protracting each vowel to an impossible length, 'as Cecil would have said.' This is in response to my describing two statues of dogs turning into women – the hinds are canine, the heads human – as 'Nile style', ie Egyptian revival of the Directoire. 'I call them *The Sphinxes*. Poor Cecil left them to me . . .' It was a considered bequest, they are almost archetypes of one strain of David's taste; one is bound to wonder whether Beaton left him more than these gorgeous gewgaws, whether he infected him with a particular sensibility, the gift for the serendipitous *placing* of things. On the other hand, it may be that it was the other way about, that Beaton learnt from David and merely (merely!) propagated the manner. One strain of his taste, as I say, is a fondness for the stuff of the Directoire and its stylistic analogue in Britain, 'Regency': there is an abundance of painted furniture, of black and gold, of airy classicism. There is nothing gothick, let alone gothic which he abhors. Then there is a taste for the Rococo and for Chinoiserie of the later 18th century – lots of gilding, lots of lacquering, lots of carving. Beyond all this the house is unclassifiable. There's a (literally) golden egg which Barbara Hutton sent him after 'misbehaving' at dinner; it arrived bound in layers of packaging like a Chinese box and attached to it was the message, 'From the goose who laid so many.' There is a pair of paintings of black minstrels: 'They're doing the Cakewalk.' '?' 'Oh, a dance of the 1890s, I think,

1880s?' Dating these things of the pre-cinematic age is not as easy as it is for my, post-war, generation to date the Charleston and the Black Bottom. 'They were given me by Diana and Duff Cooper . . . people keep wanting to buy them.' A painting by Rex Whistler shows David and a dog outside the Loggia in Wilton Park which he believes to be by Chambers, though this is probably a misattribution; like much of that painter's work it transcends the decorative and trespasses into the lyrical – it's all dappled summer and youthful optimism. Rex Whistler was one of the earliest casualties of the War; David survived it despite being wireless operator on the *Strathallan* that was torpedoed. (It's characteristic of him and his casual stoicism that he recalls the War in terms of parties.)

It's characteristic too that his house, while it is a scrapbook of his life, should be so determinedly un-nostalgic of England – it doesn't manifest a sense of loss or of longing for a retrospectively ideal homeland, and while it may sometimes hint at Wilton it never attempts to re-create it. David's expatriation shuns the stereotypical pitfalls of that state – despair, making of oneself a hyper-nationalistic cartoon, despising one's host country. He has no time, for instance, for Ceuta, the tiny Spanish protectorate 30 miles east of Tangiers: 'It's more Spanish than the Spaniards.' Tangiers was never like that; it retains the cultural mix that it had when it was an International Zone. In those days, up to 1956, fraternization between Moroccans and Europeans was much less than it is today. Now Tangiers is a place of unselfconscious racial egalitarianism, just about: I'm talking here of only one tiny (and highish) rung of its society. David Herbert is described by one friend as 'the centre cog of a community of egomaniacs. You must understand that; no one can survive here without being an egomaniac.' Much of this community's gossip is of course impenetrable to the outsider and is necessarily parochial; its feuds are, like all good feuds, protracted out of all proportion to their causes; its hierarchies are determined by character rather than rank, by talent rather than title.

When you arrive at David Herbert's house and go through the conch-encrusted doorway and down the stairs into its serial formation of strikingly coloured rooms you may meet

there anyone from a former spy to a model who married money (and they do), from a Gulf princess to a restaurateur, from a Moroccan economist to an English equestrian. Martinis are abundant and dry, conversation frequently tends towards the combative – David clearly isn't keen on those who cede points out of mistaken politeness, they're 'no enjoyment.' Worthiness unleavened by wit is worthless.

He has long had the reputation of being a kind of unofficial ambassador, more maybe, a viceroy in spite of himself: Ian Fleming wrote part of *Diamonds Are Forever* whilst staying at David's and repaid that hospitality by describing him in a letter to his wife as 'the Queen Mother of Tangiers'. When David was asked recently by the editor of Ann Fleming's correspondence whether he objected to its being published, he replied: 'No, I'm sure the Queen Mother won't mind.' And the house is cattily referred to as 'the Royal Train'; the way one room succeeds another does, perhaps, suggest carriages, and each has its complement of signed photographs of the Royal Family. But these are no more 'name-dropping' than are a van Dyck of the 5th Countess of Pembroke or a print of the Crimean palace where his great-great-grandmother was born. David is vastly proud of his Royal friendships, and for him not to display these iconic tokens of them would be disloyal – it would be false modesty stretched to the point where it becomes dishonesty.

There is however a sort of self-denial he devoutly espouses. He is good at smoking, cigarettes suit him, his gestures with his holder are expressive, pointed. Nonetheless he gives up for Lent each year: 'What else can you give up . . . there's nothing else you do thirty times a day. You don't make love thirty times a day.' He knows very well that forbidding himself tobacco is more than forbidding himself a solace and drug – it's more like a self-inflicted impairment. He is zealous about imposing constraints on his sybaritism.

David Herbert works for, rather than merely lends his name to, various charities, among which the People's Dispensary For Sick Animals gets his greatest attention. Its graveyard, with pet headstones set among eucalypti in a stream's ox-bow bend, is at the bottom of Le Montagne, the exaggeratedly

named Tangerine suburb near whose summit David's villa stands. From the upper floor of the villa the several hills of Tangiers present themselves piebald, green trees and white buildings whose horizontal emphases are punctuated here and there by minarets. One of these, astonishingly, is not a muezzin's perch but the tower of the Anglican church of St Andrew. Save where liturgical necessity has demanded an extempore compromise its design is Moorish: nothing could be further from the unfettered gothic of, say, garrison churches in India. Here a proselytizing tact and ecumenical courtesy are manifest in the transept's being inscribed with the Lord's Prayer in Arabic. Here, among soldiers and consuls and merchants and remittance men who loved Morocco but clung to their natal faith, is where David Herbert hopes that he will be buried; among, too, Alfred Hassan Taylor who died two months short of his third birthday in 1877, and Walter Harris who was correspondent in Tangiers for the London *Times* for half a century till 1934, and a score of young RAF men shot down over the Straits of Gibraltar.

David comes to the church every Sunday, distributes psalters, sings from the *English Hymnal* with more gusto than skill, makes the collection. Standing with the velvet money bag at the altar he is irresistibly reminiscent of a small boy waiting to receive an approbatory pat from the Chaplain. He is expectantly at attention, on 'best behaviour' just as he might have been sixty or more years ago on another Sunday when outside there were no vulturine turkeys for sale. The service is by no means solemn. The Padre is an inveterate ironist and this no doubt inspirits the congregation of expatriates and tourists and consular officials. Service over, the round of anecdote and gossip is taken up again.

Over pre-prandial drinks David talks of the only occasion on which he has eaten pea-hen, on a picnic in the grounds of a Royal palace at Meknes. The meat of the bird was, he says, 'like chicken from Heaven', but the company's enjoyment of it was diminished by the palace grounds being full of peacocks, anxious for droppings from the table. Then he vaults from an expression of regret at the disappearance of the old, 'neo Georgian' phone boxes in Britain to an explanation of

the name of Hore Belisha whose eponymous orange 'beacons' still signal pedestrian crossings: 'His family was Moroccan Jewish, from Essaouira, and their name was Hareb El Isha . . .' On to another acquaintance from the 30s, the traitor Guy Burgess: 'Now he was *horrible*, a very nasty man.' And another, Joseph Kennedy, whose losing an eye to a trout fly was 'the best thing that could have happened to him – he was so pro-German. You could tell when there was a big air raid coming up by the way he beat it out of London.' Actually David's estimates of people usually err on the side of generosity, it's just that his sorties into malice are more entertaining to record; when the name of a well known interior designer is mentioned David throws up his hands. 'I could *never* like her, not after what she did to that room. You *cannot* put that Indian frippery, whatever it was, into a perfectly proportioned Georgian room.' His vehemence is not to be underestimated: decorative solecisms are to be stamped on, punished. He loathes offences against tectonic propriety and proportion (the subtlest legacy of Wilton is in the scale of one of the rooms he added to his house – its windows stretch from the floor to a height of about six and a half feet, thus prompting the illusion that the room is far, far taller than it actually is. The effect is thorough, the trick is unforced, guileful.)

David Herbert's garden is as singular as his house. Among datura and arum lilies and Chinese fuchsias and copa di ora he breeds love-birds as bright as the flowers all round them. The effect is of an operatic jungle, a jungle under control, just. Tending this garden and its birds, writing and playing patience – these are the ways that he fills his life when he is not with friends. As we walked through the garden one lunchtime he referred to a Mr Dawkins. For a moment I tried to recall if he was someone I had met. Then I realized that he is the subject of two paintings David owns by the 18th century Scottish antiquary and restorer Gavin Hamilton, who lived much of his life in Rome and is a minor figure in the histories of both neoclassicism and the Grand Tour. Mr Dawkins was presumably a merchant or envoy like Hamilton's distant kinsman, Sir William. What was revealing was the way that David took imaginative possession of this man. It is as if familiarity with

his features has granted him an intimate appreciation of Dawkins. The same process is at work when David alludes to Sir Jock Brooks, the British Minister at Tangiers in the 1880s whose legacy is the now ubiquitous yellow flower (or weed) oxalys which he introduced from Persia.

David's power to conjure people gives them an immediacy and contemporaneity; and it gives him a place in a greater history, a peripheral place maybe, but a place nonetheless. (In his fascinating, bulging albums of the 1930s David himself crops up at parties and balls in juxtaposition with Mussolini, human anomalies, the Sudetenland, Garbo, the Abdication Crisis and so on.) His house may after all be more than a *scrapbook* of his life, it may be a catalogue of correlatives for his sense of history. David would probably enjoy the idea that he has made something outside his own time, it implies a real generosity.

1985

Big Whig: Sir John Vanbrugh

Vanbrugh was three sorts of adventurer: martial, artistic and, above those, social. He was an exemplary Whig in that he loved a lord and connected well; he was not taken up so much as self raised; he assumed the airs of a grandee and was eventually taken for one though not, sure enough, by Swift who treated him with an amused if toothless contempt – irony is, as they say, the weapon of the impotent. There is of course no irony in the fact that his great palaces are the nearest things to monuments to absolutism that this country possesses – their opulence and scale are purposeful, witting testaments to a moment of *aristocracy*, in its Elizabethan sense of oligarchy by nobs. It is nowadays a commonplace that architecture serves rather than defines, that a particular system of building may be employed in the service of opposing and mutually exclusive forms of government or worship. But this was no more the case at the turn of the eighteenth century than it was in the third decade of this when modernism raised its functional head and its detractors deployed spurious quasi-moral arguments against it in the knowledge that they are reckoned weightier than mere aesthetic ones. Vanbrugh knew what he was doing and so, apparently, did everyone else. The Palladian reaction to him was achieved with such alacrity that fashion turned against him. There was never a Vanbrughian mainstream and his epigoni were few. One was the hustling Florentine Alessandro Galilei who sought to set himself up as a rival but worked for Vanbrugh at Kimbolton before going back to Italy where he designed, *inter alia*, a royal palace for the Stuart pretender (to be erected in Hyde Park) and the parodically Vanbrughian church of San Giovanni in Laterano. More parochially there were the Bastard brothers, John and

William, who rebuilt Blandford, after the fire of 1731, in a style that is indebted to Vanbrugh's Eastbury, six miles away and the most recent great house of the area; later, there came many of the nineteenth century industrial and prison architects. Were the begetters of the Surrey Correction Centres (aka Brixton and Wandsworth Prisons), Messrs Chawner and Hill, cognisant that their Vanbrughian forts were signals of what Sir John Summerson would come to recognize as the key to Vanbrugh – his incarceration? Kerry Downes, whose second book on Vanbrugh this is (he's done Wren and Hawksmoor as well), is not a man given to fancy and is as reticently mute about his subject's avatars as he is about his sources.

The main source was the nick, being banged up in tronk. This experience has been the making of other artists. Vanbrugh has, despite the station he subsequently arrived at, more in common with Orton and Genet than with such architect/writers as Thomas Hardy and John Arden. For one thing he went the other way round, from writer to architect, and for another he was manifestly in a different class to Hardy as an architect – my evidence here is Hardy's limply dreadful house in Dorchester; (I don't know if anything Arden designed was built). Further he was a political prisoner, of a sort: Downes is thorough, as he is on much else incidental gen, about the Franco–British swopping of hostages and the Dunkirk fleet's nabbing of potential hostages. But the cause of imprisonment doesn't condition the physical experience of it: the cells of the library-book abuser and the recidivous thief are near enough those of the 'spy'. They all suffer the same. No matter what relief may be granted by outside food and servants – a gent doing a stretch was still a gent – the notion of confinement is qualitatively like. Vanbrugh's plays are incidental to this crucial thread: he was a competent scriptwriter of often base comedy whose emotional and sensory realizations were to be in a different medium. You have to think the unthinkable: you have to believe that a paid 'wit' might suddenly come up with not just something in a different, non-written medium but something which bends the rules of that medium without resort to illiteracy. Also that he

might come up with something that is not, *pace* Downes, the tectonic sibling of those plays. Vanbrugh was a crude playwright, but an immensely subtle architect – albeit one who used crude forms: it's here that he's akin to his fellow jailbirds. The construction is sound, the content is wild, with all the wildness of an imagination belonging to a body physically constrained by countable bricks and chronically regulated (slops, gob, trot-about, days to release). Seaton Delaval and the remnants of Eastbury, his third biggest house, and the whole of Grimsthorpe are sites of terror cut with carious laughter: Blenheim and Castle Howard are less charged, no doubt through photographic familiarity and scrubbing-brush care and their bereavement of meaning – the great Whig fall has rendered them purposeless, turned them into stage sets for domestic squalor: the junkers are all junkies now, and often in literal nicks.

Castle Howard and Blenheim are, famously, products of the partnership with Hawksmoor. The latter stuff wasn't, and it is in these comparatively smaller houses where the martial, the neo-mediaeval, and the potently lugubrious combine, that Vanbrugh's unmitigated, unamended gifts are most apparent: these houses are mad and stern and abominably muscular. They are extravagantly dissonant, freakish in their scale, imbued with a sullen primitivism. Had Abel Evans not written, 'Lie heavy on him, Earth, for he/Laid many a heavy load on thee', someone else would have done so. Kerry Downes is a bit like the Earth. He is a dogged and, it must be said, sometimes dullish writer who has buried his subject beneath a mausoleum of data, dates, fees, facts and walk-ons whose genealogy is hurled at you. He is a sedulous researcher who has loitered long, too long, in muniment rooms and record-offices the length of the land. There is not a paper that he has not read. His cross referencing is showily impressive – either he has a mind like a computer, or he has a computer. His habit of summarizing the plots of the plays (which he seems to know from reading rather than from their deservedly rare performances) is tiresome. His talent for narrative is untutored, he tells you everything and nothing. But the learning is

massive: he may not make you know the man but he makes you know all about him. The void at the centre is for us to fill. It's the void academe traditionally leaves to civilization.

Sir John Vanbrugh by Kerry Downes

1987

A Map of the Wen

Small snapshots (2 × 2 inches mostly, indifferently printed, often showing no perspective correction) are great levellers. This immodestly titled book is illustrated by almost 900 such photographs which combine to serve the doubtful cause of architectural egalitarianism. Detail is invariably lost, with the result that buildings which are stylistically akin but of vastly different quality are homogenized, reduced to a gestural mean. More importantly, scale is only meagrely indicated. Large or tall structures do not need proportional photographic representation but they do need *artful* representation, something that shows both their correlation with their surroundings and their effect on a greater skyline. This may sound a counsel of cumbrous perfection. But take the case of All Souls, Langham Place – a church that is familiar to all our eyes. Here it is shown from the southernmost bay of the old Langham Hotel with the unhappy results that Broadcasting House is dwarfed and that the drear eastern extension of that building (which truncates the silhouette of All Souls's spire) is not apparent. Take again St Clement Danes: here it has the aspect of a church in a sleepy sylvan square rather than that of one at the junction of Strand and Aldwych; maybe it's the full summer trees that do the damage. Winter – witness Pevsner – is the season for topography; you can see more. It is also the season for photography of buildings, a lesson that is lost even on 'The Buildings of England'.

But then Pevsner and Nairn – his 'London' (1966, Penguin, out of print, out of date) is still peerless – are writers who in their obverse ways, the one quasi scientific and the other waywardly poetic, do not require illustration. Their prose does the trick, it can make us see what they have seen, it is often

more interesting than its subject. Messrs Jones and Woodward have the eyes all right, but they are unpractised or at least timorous writers with no particular gifts for figurative devices. They are splendidly informed and rather flat. They are both architects and write as though unused to writing for a non-specialist audience; so they assume in the reader a vague familiarity with the solemn argot of technical description and use English in a way that is peculiar to architects. Some of their vocabulary will seem a bit rum to the 'lay' reader: it is the vocabulary that is normally associable with the po-faced championship of Modernism and it seems inappropriate to two authors who are fashionably eclectic in their tastes if rather reticent in admitting their enthusiasm – it is clear though that they are very sensibly contemptuous of that hard snobbery which deals in isms and spurious divisions. Also: they ignore the idea that Modernism was not a fashion, a style: they recognize that the architecture of the 'carnivores' in the 50s and 60s was often no worse than that of the self proclaiming 'herbivores'; they do not take architects at their own estimation. They are more interested in achievement than in aspiration and have a talent for deriding received opinion, for turning a sacred cow into a bleeding mess on an abattoir floor. For instance, they compare Churchill Gardens unfavourably with neighbouring Dolphin Square, and a few hundred yards to the north they write of Pimlico School: 'The glazed façades to the classrooms, apart from offering tropical conditions to the children, reverse the basic front/back, public/private logic of street architecture.' And then they put the boot in: 'The building received an RIBA award in 1972.' Just across the river from this trio is Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's Battersea Power Station; the authors are properly appreciative of its might (though the photograph, a bigger one than usual, succeeds against all odds in making it look less than magnificent) and of Scott's unclassifiable talent. They include his Guinness Brewery and his Bankside Power Station, but not the house that he built for himself in Clarendon Place, Tyburnia, nor the William Booth Memorial Training College in Camberwell. The first omission is of little moment, the second is indicative of the book's gravely limited scope.

As I say, the title is immodest, a bit of a boast. 'London' should be qualified by 'inner' or 'central'. The suburbs are poorly represented and the Thames has, just as in life, proved to be a barrier – the authors evidently find all that lies south of it something of a mystery; few buildings (and then only the most obvious ones) are shown. Scott's Camberwell college quite obviously accords with the criteria for inclusion (admittedly vague) that the authors specify in their introduction. By comparison with Camberwell (where the remarkable group of public buildings on Peckham Road, the terraces and cottage orné of The Grove, Francis Bedford's wrecked church near the former Surrey Canal, and the Dan Dare Georgian of the 30s wing of King's College Hospital should all have merited entries) Hampstead does very well. The pages devoted to it are unintentionally droll – one gets the impression that much of it, indeed much of North London, is composed of advanced houses built by advanced architects for their own use. Even without the strenuously polite captions one would, I think, know what they are – after all they look like tectonic émigrés from industrial estates, they squat in other houses' back gardens, their windows don't open. (The authors are not always so kind to their contemporaries – they are wittily damning of Evans and Shalev's work at the Alexandra Road/ Boundary Road site.) The false, or at least *partial*, impression of certain areas that is the result of the capricious selections – not a single mansion block is shown in Maida Vale for instance – means, eventually, that the entire city is lopsidedly presented and the book appears merely to be an inventory of the atypical.

Still, the lopsidedness is certainly fresh and there is a commendable emphasis on the sort of building that orthodoxly 'modern' guides and determinist histories used to ignore. The authors have an evident fondness for *moderne* flats and factories, for late and very late classicism (Donald McMorran does especially well), for the cubism of Gowan and Douglas Stephen, for Richardson and Burnet. Equally they are unkeen on the gothic revival save in its loonybin excesses (Holy Village etc.), on technology masquerading as architecture (they have ample opportunity to express this distaste), on

the slavish application of half-baked theory (the Smithsons' Robin Hood Gardens). However they actually include very little that they think worthless: thus the lopsided London they give us is an only mildly contaminated blueprint of their ideal London, a place that is predominantly classical, a place which shows the catholicity of classicism. This is a guide wittingly built for today's taste.

A Guide to The Architecture of London by Edward Jones & Christopher Woodward

1983

Never Got Off The Ground

Six years ago at the Guildhall (of whose library Mr Hyde is Keeper of Maps and Prints) there was an exhibition that was to give its name to this book. It was accompanied by a *very* slim catalogue, slim as Bobby Sands Diet Crispbread, so slim that I cannot find my copy of it. It obviously seemed a good idea to bulk it out, to turn it from a partially illustrated and captioned list into something that breaks down its subject generically and topologically, that is abundantly if not altogether comprehensively illustrated, that tries to make some sense of the disparate essays on the face of London that have been made down the centuries. I have no idea how Felix Barker, lately of the unlamented London *Evening News*, came to be involved; it says here that he is the co-author of *London: 2,000 Years of a City and its People* and I recall that a few months ago the *Standard* ran a series of articles by him about what a committee of 'eminent' Londoners (including Owen Luder of the RIBA) considered to be (tourist) London's finest buildings. I note that Mr Barker lives in Lindsey House at Blackheath and that Mr Hyde lives at Greenwich, so they are near neighbours in what is the most agreeable of London *banlieues*. Anyway, whatever the origin of the collaboration the dominant flavour is that of Mr Barker's faintly matey, bloke-ish prose – which is certainly not what one expects in a book of this kind, but which is just about preferable to either the polytechspiel of planning pundits or the effortful mandarin of those who would be Summerson. Mr Barker writes apropos a scheme by Ernest Runtz (the author of, *inter alia*, the attractively lumpy Edwardian Baroque block at the west end of Queen Anne's Gate) that it 'was a presumption calculated to make the entire Court of Aldermen choke in their turtle soup'.

This is just one instance of the tired chattiness that dogs the project; a despairing editor should have sent all such facetiae the way of the schemes that the book deals with. Perhaps one should not make too much of this; certainly the authors have done a fair amount of rooting around, though here again their eagerness not to trouble the common reader leads them to the blithe insouciance of statements like 'Recent research shows that the plan [made by Wren for the City after the Great Fire] was impracticable on several accounts and at no time seriously entertained by King or Parliament'. Whose research? The bibliography doesn't tell us.

Plans on such a scale have not been all that rare. Indeed a certain megalomania, albeit a rather benign megalomania, informs many of the schemes noted; the authors believe that the very size and ambition of some schemes suggest that their begetters never expected to see them realized. I am not so sure; one of the things about megalomaniacs is that they are maniacs and maniacs do have an unusual way of seeing things, a distorted expectation, a disregard (quite literal in this context) for whatever may be in the way of their wheezes. It is thoroughly likely that George Dance junior's scheme for two parallel London Bridges was entirely in earnest; the authors are quite right that it is the 'most dazzling of all London's unfulfilled dreams', but their supposition that Dance's silence when the scheme was shelved 'suggests that he never [*sic*] seriously expected that his fantasy would ever [*sic*] be built' is worthless. Dance was 60 years old when he published his proposals, and was Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy, the celebrated architect of Newgate Prison, a town planner whose work had actually come to fruition – we owe to Dance and Robert Mylne that network of splendid boulevards in decay that is to be found in Kennington, Lambeth, and Southwark. It is most rash to assume that he did not intend his London Bridges to be built. Like many unbuilt projects it has the grandeur and formality that we take for granted in Paris and Rome, and like many it is brought vividly to life by a talented perspective artist, William Daniell. The part played by such artists here should not be underestimated. As Gavin Stamp's *The Great Perspectivists* (Trefoil Books/

RIBA, 1982) shows, this now rather neglected art was at its height between about 1800 and 1930; thus contemporary representations of proposals by, say, Wren are nowhere near so seductive as those of Soane's dreams. I say 'dreams' because Soane, Dance's pupil, in turn employed the 'visionary' J. M. Gandy as a draughtsman and perspectivist; like many other unsuccessful architects Gandy was a marvellous architectural artist with a gift for the fanciful interpretations of elevations. He was also a painter of architectural fantasies, though less extravagant than 'Mad' Martin, who crops up here with (by his and the book's standards) a somewhat sober memorial to the Duke of Wellington in the form of an arch across the present Marylebone Road near Park Square West and with a characteristic and better-known project that combined a nod to Hygeia with a desire to turn the Thames into the Nile. How he must have hated the gothic revival that was beginning to assert itself towards the end of his career, though he might have been heartened by the survival of classicism throughout the 19th century. The unbuilt gothic designs shown here are surprisingly few, and with the exception of Seddon and Lamb's 550ft tall Imperial Monumental Halls at Westminster and Burges's Law Courts one must be grateful to those who scotched them. Not though to those who sat on Soane's proposed Royal Palace in Hyde Park, on Cuthbert Brodrick's War Office (which, *pace* the authors, is not merely an adaptation of his Leeds Town Hall), on Francis Goodwin's Grand National Cemetery, on Rigby Wason's and William Bardwell's proposals for the area that is now known as Victoria – in this case it was Wason who sat on himself; he was yet another dodgy politician who was found out. *Plus ça change.* Well it does actually, a bit.

The man in the street has been replaced by the person in the pedestrian piazza and this person has to be *consulted*, hence the tiresome but useful apparatus of committees, public enquiries, etc., which can go on for so long that by the time they are finished the project in question is no longer financially feasible. But it ought not to be overlooked that this apparatus can often be a sham of a sort. The authors state that Norman Foster's 1977 plan for a Hammersmith Centre 'is one

of the few for which prominent local residents have held protest meetings not against but in favour'. Now if I remember rightly the 'prominent local residents' were mostly architects, including a sometime partner of Foster's, and the editor of an architectural magazine; having said which it must be admitted that *anything* done to Hammersmith Broadway would be likely to improve the place. An interesting feature of the dreary, artless drawing of Foster's project is that one of the lifts appears to be out of control and breaking away from the tenth floor of the tower whose outside it was, a moment ago, ascending. One should further point out that the drawing is just the sort of thing that the progressive sheep who inhabited architectural schools in the mid-1960s did in emulation of their preposterous, plastic bow-tied guru Peter Cook.

Many of these buildings, had they been erected, would by now of course have been destroyed to make way for later improvements or would, like many that did get put up, have been altered out of all recognition. At least having them on paper we have them in the ideal state in which they were conceived. Clearly many buildings that are actually with us possess a more potent character in drawings made at the time when they were got than they do now, with lots of concrete and glass crowding in and people wearing hopelessly anachronistic clothes inhabiting them. The stuff in this album has a perfection that it could never have retained if it had actually made it from paper on to the ground; it has about it a sort of rude utopianism or, if you prefer, self-deluding optimism; and no single design is more self-deludingly optimistic than that devised in 1716 in Urbino by the Earl of Mar. It was for a royal palace to be built in Hyde Park and its first occupant was to be the Old Pretender, James III (as he intended to be). The design is unremarkable; at about the same moment Alessandro Galilei was attempting to persuade George I to adopt *his* plan for a palace in St James's Park. Galilei was sent packing. He gets as rough a deal from the authors as he did from the king; they describe him as a dilettante, and I'm certain they intend the newer, pejorative sense. It strikes me as an inapt handle for the man who was to do the façade of S. Giovanni in Laterano, which is mighty and massive and freakish – just

the sort of thing that monarchs are supposed to want. But the Hanoverians were a tight-fisted bunch till it came to Prinny, and he was so profligate that by the time he came to the throne no one would lend him a penny, and he was disenchanted with architects, whom he reckoned were all as bent as Nash. So the Royal Family never got a palace of the quality or scale of Blenheim or Wentworth Woodhouse (which because it is not opened to the public is lost to us in a way that the still-born buildings here are not). It is a nice point to ponder – the question of whether or not our Royal Family's popularity is in any way allied to the dreary meagreness of its London billet. The other great 'what-if' is raised by the chapter devoted to bridges that never got built. South London begins immediately south of the Thames; north London begins somewhere north of the Euston Road. What I mean is that south London is a sort of backwater, largely because of the scarcity of bridges which renders the Thames a far greater barrier than, say, the Seine. Paris is spread just about equally on both sides of the river; London is lopsided and certain of the bridges that might have been built would have corrected that tilt.

London As It Might Have Been by Felix Barker and Ralph Hyde

1982

Future Retrospection: Blade Runner's Sets

It is a truism that representations of the future (and, indeed, of the past) are more indicative of the era they are made than the era they are made about. Characteristically they lift a couple of aspects of the familiar (present) world and stretch or heighten them, or distil them into caricature. Ridley Scott insouciantly adheres to this procedure just as Verne, Wells (whom Oscar Wilde called 'a scientific Jules Verne') and Huxley did before him. His cinematic precursors obviously include Fritz Lang, whose *Metropolis* was all Sant 'Elia and New York and arch expressionism; William Cameron Menzies, whose *Things to Come* was Art Deco laid on with a trowel; and Charlie Chaplin, whose *Modern Times* was a technological cartoon.

Thus Scott's idea of Los Angeles 40 years hence in *Blade Runner* is a salad of past styles, by which I mean pre-1982 styles. This is cute, clever and predictable: his future, like every other ever posited, is the present only more so, a reflection in a distorting mirror, a reflection which, alas, is presented with such thorough humourlessness that you must assume that it is meant to be taken seriously. The quasi-cultural fragment of the early 1980s that Scott has chosen to exploit is the craze for exhuming the (fairly recent) past. He evidently reckons that in 2019 in LA this 'copyist' urge will be even stronger than it is today.

Scott, who (all too clearly) began his career as a designer for television, rummages with promiscuous (or 'post-modern') abandon through the store of the world's architectural gestures. He does not oblige himself to achieve what have hitherto been the predominant characteristics of utopian and dystopian cities – homogeneity and consistency. Of course a

consistency is imposed on the film by the manner in which it is shot: the constant rain, the range of tiresomely ingenious devices that disorientate the spectator, the facetiously world-weary narration that the protagonist delivers and, most of all, another echo of 1940s private-eye movies, the 'atmospheric' lighting. Light is always indirect – beamed or diffused or reflected – which makes it 'atmospheric'. So, on to the stylistic salad that is given this hefty dressing, as colourful and crude as something out of a Kraft bottle.

The first man to be hauled on for a thunderous round of applause is the late John Martin. Martin died 128 years ago last 17 February on the Isle of Man, having given a lifetime to devising exuberantly fantastical (and unrealized) architectural improvements, and to composing equally fantastical apocalyptic canvases that earned him a place in the British pantheon and the sobriquet 'Mad'. Scott is living testimony to the truth of T. S. Eliot's maxim that 'great poets don't borrow, they steal'. Scott, in the nicest possible way of course, exhibits the influence of Martin. He is not the first film maker to do so; D. W. Griffith and Coppola in *Apocalypse Now* trod before him, but they were mere pickpockets beside Scott's sledgehammer and stocking-mask blagger. However, he is the first to capture photographically the grandiose blowsiness that Martin did so well in paint. This is no puny achievement: Martin's Michelin Man buildings, with their swollen columns and rustication like folds of fat, look splendidly tawdry in the film.

The next to collect laurels must be American 'Borax' designers, Bel Geddes, Loewy, people like that. Scott gives the OK to streamlining, and why not. There is a fair bit of unrestructured *moderne* to be glimpsed in the shadows. And what else? There is classicism of the Edwin Cooper sort; a soupçon of the Milan railway station manner; some purposeful chunks of Archigram stuff; and a wondrous interior peopled by brightly clothed tumbling dwarfs who look as though they are the pets of an ideal madman in Naples, 1800.

There is also a lot of Hong Kong (neon and noodles, not Norman Foster) since for some reason Los Angeles is full of Chinese: I suspect some point about inner cities was being made but the script is not wildly lucid. Finally, there is a very

large building that recalls the insaner sort of public housing schemes in outer Paris. I note that Arthur Drexler described such a scheme as having the look of a 'twenties set for a German film'. And what happens in this extravagant illusion? Actors decorate it: the Word is not something in which Scott is much interested. The titular hero has to track down and kill robots that are supposedly indistinguishable from humans. The film is so bereft of emotional resonance, so wanting a *moral* dimension that the humans seem no less robotic than the real robots. Scott is the veteran (and victim) of 3000 advertising films. Here he has nothing to sell and all the time in the world to sell it. The art is in his props; it's all wrapping and no gift.

Since long before the advent of cinema there has been an exchange between architecture as building and architecture as imagined ideal. This exchange has not been entirely felicitous. Approximations to the paradisiac landscapes of the seventeenth century are one thing, doltish attempts (not peculiar to Paris) to emulate the nightmare city of *Metropolis* are quite another. When the exchange is in the opposite direction – the imaginary drawing on and synthesizing strands of the real – the results, even if they are disappointing, are unlikely to be harmful. Imagined architecture is like its twin in every aspect save two rather vital ones: it is not public art and it is not functional. Imagined architecture is never quite in earnest; it is chimeric, fun, sublime. Do not copy.

1982

Built By Pen: The Great Perspectivists

The Secretary of the Royal Fine Arts Commission, an anomalous body which is supposed to be the ultimate arbiter of public (i.e. architectural) taste, once rather proudly showed me a series of drawings purporting to represent a building designed by a well-known (you might say notorious) architect for a well-known (ditto) institution in one of the more agreeable areas of central London. The drawings were both 'illegible' and meagre – they gave no idea of what the building would look like nor were they of any merit as works of inutile, 'pure' art. In a lecture that he gave to the RIBA in 1951 the architect and historian H Goodhart-Rendel averred that the perspective sketch of this sort is 'the dishonest architect's most artful and convenient confederate'. It occurs to me that the drawings that I was shown, that the RFAC Secretary described as being 'in – 's usual *language*', were perfect paradigms of Goodhart-Rendel's proposition.

The obfuscating drawing is in fact one of the most frequently deployed tools of today's architects – it conveys nothing of size, scale, colour, texture. It is a sort of Rorschach blob of a drawing, everything and nothing to the beholder who, likely as not, is a member of a planning committee, a 'layman' who in such circumstances is easy meat for a smooth talking architect. Well may he throw up his hands in horror when he sees the building that he approved those months or years ago in all its sullen beastliness.

Things were not always so. It is hard, for instance, to believe that H R Myerscough-Walker's painting of H A N Medd's Catholic Cathedral in New Delhi was rejected by the Royal Academy in 1933 because of a 'technical imperfection'. Myerscough-Walker was among the last able practitioners of the

specialized but potentially popular art of architectural perspective; his nocturne of London University's Senate House is among numerous drawings and paintings included in this volume which have an appeal far beyond that implied by the rather dry title. (The Senate House painting has as much in common with the urban and suburban nocturnes of Atkinson Grimshaw and his imitators as it does with specifically *architectural* representation.) Myerscough-Walker was at the end of a tradition which drew initially upon such diverse sources as Claude, Hubert Robert, Piranesi, Canaletto – artists who incorporated buildings and ruins into ideal landscapes and who imagined fantastical cities. So, in other words the *functional* art of architectural perspective was founded upon an art that was done for its own sake, for the sake of a non-specialist audience. There are many plates here whose interest is extra-architectural. Chief among these are a couple of mezzotints of paintings by John Martin.

It is well known that D W Griffith drew on Martin's paintings for the design of his sets and thus established a Hollywood convention. It is also clear, I think, that Martin or Griffith or both of them had some influence on the design of cinemas too. Whether it is strictly legitimate to put Martin's work in a book allegedly devoted to architectural art is moot; if Martin why not, indeed, Atkinson Grimshaw and Sickert and Wadsworth. Architecture was the habitual subject matter of these very different painters and though they tended towards representation rather than invention their sense of architecture is the equal of Martin's. Martin is not the only fantasist lurking in Gavin Stamp's eclectic anthology: two exhibitions of the mid-70s, 'Marble Halls' at the V&A and 'London As It Might Have Been' at the Guildhall, emphasized the sheerly opulent inventions of the 19th Century. Nothing – not even St Pancras seen from the top of Pentonville Road as it is in O'Connor's vespertine painting – matches the gaga might of Alfred Waterhouse's proposed design for the Law Courts in the Strand. One can but be thankful that it was not built. Street's thing is bad enough but it at least avoids the besetting characteristic of Waterhouse's stuff – that of ageing gracelessly. Another (rather late) Gothic project of note was

Seddon and Lamb's scheme for an almighty Imperial Monumental Halls which would have dwarfed both Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament, between which two buildings it was to have been situated. There are too a number of drawings of buildings that their begetters can never have expected to be realized – Beresford Pite's Rackhamesque design for a West End club is perhaps the most wayward of these. And then there are idealized cityscapes – a genre that achieves its apogee in H W Brewer's 'The Two Bridges'.

The majority of the plates, though, show buildings that exist or did exist. (The most grievous loss is of course the Crystal Palace; one of which I was previously ignorant was a curiosity of the 90s, an Hispanic looking place built in Maida Vale for Alfred Gilbert, the sculptor of Eros). The best of these plates go far beyond 'mere' illustration. A C Webb's view of Battersea Power Station across a busy crowded river and David Muirhead Bone's '55 Broadway' conjure up a lost city (teeming with people and full of energy). This atmospheric art has a potency and an ability to provoke nostalgia which little English painting of its period (the late 30s) possesses. Most 'serious' painters of that time were toying with European isms and had little time for the tradition of cityscape and anecdotal street scene that is so well represented here.

An incidental pleasure of the book, one that may strain the bounds of mass credulity, is that it links the name of Dr Stamp with that of the RIBA's thrusting, dynamic and altogether forward-looking President, Mr Owen Luder, who has contributed the foreword. Mr Luder is a man whom I would have associated with the sort of drawing that the Royal Fine Arts Commission is so fond of; evidently I would have been wrong. I think that the conjunction of these two names must point to a new caring ecumenicism within the architectural community and I anticipate with pleasure Dr Stamp's sympathetic foreword to Mr Luder's forthcoming *Concrete And Me – A Love Story*.

The Great Perspectivists by Gavin Stamp

1982

Dunsociologizin: Suburbs of the 30s

In 1974 I reviewed a book called *Suburbia* by David Thorns. I didn't like it – 'obfuscating banal jargon . . . turning in upon itself like a self-perpetuating verruca . . . deceitful in its attempt to endow generalisations with a "scientifically" determined finality . . .' Paul Oliver, one of the three architects who have written this well-documented and admirably illustrated study, would disagree with me. In his introduction he notes that suburbs 'may be crudely classified into broad types. This David Thorns has done, sketching a typology of eight categories which correspond to working-class and middle-class divisions, and which are, in both classes, characterised as planned residential, unplanned residential, planned industrial and unplanned industrial. Though these groupings and the subdivisions that might be developed from them . . .' You get the picture. Mr Oliver is, if anything, even more prolix than Thorns and he is often as obscure. The chapters' subtitles also give the game away: 'The Synthesis of Contrasting Values', 'Suburban Values and the Role of the Media', 'Symbolism in the Home', 'Imagery of the House and Garden'. The last two find Mr Oliver on top form: 'There are many other garden ornaments that summarise the values important to Dunroamin. A single garden may contain a whole vocabulary of them – such as that illustrated opposite [photo of gnomes, concrete cockerel, spaniel etc. which, according to the caption, "proclaim the values of a family"], approached by a "Lychgate", connotative of traditional church going . . .' Students of this sort of stuff will particularly note the use of 'vocabulary' as a synonym for collection or set and will further admire that 'connotative'. A couple of pages on Mr Oliver tells us that 'When the front door was opened the body image of the

house assumed particular importance to the occupier, who regarded an invitation to come in across the fibre mat marked *Welcome* as a special mark of favour'. Before the front door was opened the caller might look at a stained glass peacock and reflect like Mr Oliver that: 'Genital, budding rising shapes surround it, flicking their semen trails of leaded line . . .' And on page 189 we learn that: 'In semiological terms, symbol systems in Dunroamin could be defined more precisely, but such definition would disengage a particular characteristic (and one which may be aesthetically deplored), the confusion of codes. Associational images are placed in illogical juxtapositions of period and content which defeats their clarity. It is at the meta-scale, where all are seen as constituents of one visual language – the language of Dunroamin where its symbols are related to its values – that they are best recognised and understood.' Now the man who wrote this is, I have said, an architect and one who teaches at a polytechnic, but even given these two massively advantageous starts in life it must be agreed that he has excelled himself. Remarkable performance.

We are all of course used to hearing Modern Movement stuff described in this way. What is especially pleasing here is that Mr Oliver has merely changed the object of his admiration but has not changed the way that he expresses his admiration. The sort of language he uses was invented to dissemble the vacuity of modern architecture – the less there was to describe, the fancier the description. Oliver's colleagues cannot match his thought and prose. Indeed Ian Davis's opening chapter on the preposterous 'advanced' architects of the 1930s and their loathing of suburbia is an exemplary essay which, though it covers much familiar territory, does so with wit and intelligence; he makes the worthwhile point that the root of modernist antipathy may have lain in the fact that most suburban houses were not designed by architects, but by builders. In other words 'professional designers' were resentful of the efforts of 'amateurs'. This chapter also contains a good account of the farcically sinister CIAM cruise of 1933 when Le Corbusier, Aalto, Wells Coates and a group of like-minded visionaries sailed from Marseilles to Athens talking life and

ideas, plotting the architectural future of Europe, and eventually drafting a charter or manifesto. Mr Davis is also good on the advertising ploys of builders – it would have been very easy indeed to poke fun at whoever it was that described Essex as 'healthy' or Tatsfield near Biggin Hill as the 'South London Alps' but he resists the temptation and shows how the advertisements reflect potential buyers' aspirations and self-estimates rather than the houses and loci themselves.

Ian Bentley too has some intelligent things to say about the development of suburbs and astutely notes that one of the most important qualities of neo-Georgian architecture was that it was fairly easily *taught* because of its formulaic principles. The book's value does not however lie in its text. The photographs are the thing – they have been well chosen (though the reliance on snaps of north Oxford gets tiresome) and give a far more potent impression of *rus in urbe* all those years ago than any number of pages full of period colour and 'nostalgic' brand names. The subject is endlessly fascinating. I can happily spend days walking around Kingsbury (where a splendid fantasist called E. M. Trowbridge or E. G. Troubridge, they say the latter and I say the former, built castles of a sort) or Eden Park or South Norwood. Since I have never lived in such places they retain a strangeness that I find beguiling. I am glad that these writers for all their shortcomings have decided to promote the cause of inter-wars suburbia – the history of 20th-century architecture is badly in need of rewriting and this is a step in the direction of a fuller, less partial, less determinist version of what happened. It is also heartening that the authors teach architecture and that a generation of architectural students is going to have its eyes opened to the virtues of a quintessentially English form of housing which has long been admired abroad – I just hope that these students are not too fussy about the sort of language that their Associate Head of Department uses.

Dunroamin: The Suburban Semi and its Enemies by Paul Oliver, Ian Davis and Ian Bentley

1982

A Corrugated Iron Roof Over My Head

What we have here is the topology and history of those (predominantly south-eastern English) settlements which were the successors to the Victorian essays in rural utopianism, and which look like the precursors of the necessarily mobile communes of today. The nineteenth century stuff is well documented: Chartist colonies (the vestiges of one remain near Brize Norton); craft fellowships (to which is attributable the tiresome modishness of the Cotswolds); Tolstoyan communities like Whiteway, again in the Cotswolds and still extant; nuthead millenarian experiments; veg and sandals outposts. All this culminated in Letchworth, the first Garden City, a magnet for devotees of a bewildering stew of nonconformities. Today's communes are pretty much undocumented, but they will in time no doubt get their pair of eager sociologists the Hardy and Ward of 2020, say. They are, as I say, 'necessarily mobile' and this is because the greatest retrospective effect of the 'plotlanders', whose settlements are Hardy and Ward's subject, has been to precipitate planning legislation which ensures that it can never happen again; these plotlanders, the shack-colonists of, mainly, the interwar years, were regarded by planning officials, health authorities, the police and so on with the same distaste that now characterizes those same agencies' reaction to bands of itinerant hippies in buses and rusty dormobiles. The difference is that there was then next to nothing in the statute book to throw at the people who brought railway carriages to Dungeness, built bungalows on Hayling shore, converted chicken coops at Four Marks near Winchester for human habitation. (A tiny strand of this story which Hardy and Ward have failed to gather is that more or less the only successful firm of

builders of wooden houses in Britain, William Colt, began after the Great War as manufacturers of pre-fabricated fowl-pens and branched out when it was discovered what their products were actually being used for). Now of course there is a statute book bulging with proscriptions of the sorts of development scrutinized here. And it should come as no surprise to anyone that those who were instrumental in curtailing the development of plotlands were the very same people who inflicted infinitely graver scars on Britain with the wholesale redevelopment of the post-war years: it was a case of (mostly) working-class self-help defeated by a combination of the totalitarian do-goodery of middle class socialists and the small mindedness of local councillors (i.e. local business interests). This improbable alliance of bossy herbivores and municipally proud Poujardists was, as Christopher Booker memorably demonstrated in his film *City Of Towers*, particularly noxious and very potent.

Of course it was small businessmen, beady eyed opportunists (not, however, altogether bereft of altruism), who were forces behind the creation of the larger plotland settlements. These fly idealists, who recall characters from Wells, bought land that was of little agricultural use, advertised their projected colonies as 'garden villages' – nothing unusual in this, in the teens and twenties of this century nearly all developments were thus dignified – sold plots on the drip, built or promised to build roads, ended up in Carey Street. They often left behind them chaos: estates with no drainage, sewage disposal, fresh water or sea defences; estates whose development was piecemeal and arbitrary; plotholders who had dumped their savings, often post-war gratuities, into sites whose title was disputable. It all made the distributist ideal of 'three acres and cow' look as pie in the sky as it undoubtedly was. It must have been heartbreaking for the settlers. I wonder if the antipathy of the authorities was not partially occasioned by the irregularity of the business methods employed by the promoters. Anyway, the settlers persevered; they built their bungalows and shacks and shanties, decorated them riotously (this book has only monochrome photos, places like Jaywick demand colour), and did indeed enjoy a sort of arcady, if only

at the weekends. The location of settlements indicates that they often were weekend places. South Essex has so many because it was so close to the East End. South Londoners fled out to Tatsfield (which is rather well preserved) and to other villages on the North Downs or headed for the Coast. The West London resort was the Thames valley between Eel Pie Island at Twickenham and, upstream, Runnymede. Even those who lived full time at such places tended to be dependent on the capital for their work, and commuted daily. Plots (or 'stands' as Ian Nairn called them in 'The Buildings of England' volume on Sussex) that were turned into smallholdings were rather different; they were often remote, in the most inhospitable parts of the countryside, and they tended to be more haphazardly laid out. Predominantly recreational former plotlands like Peacehaven and East Wittering and Hayling only give their origins away today by the closeness of one building to the next – otherwise they might be conventional bungaloid developments, teeming with oldsters. In the country, though, one still can find wooden houses with 'colonial' verandahs, houses built of corrugated iron thick with generations of paint, houses made from railway carriages. It is clear that while seaside properties have prospered with increased leisure the lot of the (forgotten) rural working class is still a pretty indigent one. Because of the inflexibility of the insurance companies it is just about impossible to get a mortgage against such properties, and thus they remain 'unimproved'. The land they are on is often more valuable if they are demolished, as building sites for a new generation of rancho-style rural slums.

The plotlands I know best, those around the northern and western edges of the New Forest, have changed in a most unhappy way. Many properties still remain extant, but others have simply disappeared: at villages such as Canada, Bohemia, Nomansland and Hyde the smallholders have gone, and so have their cabins, to be replaced by modest orgies of cedar shingle and York stone. Rural squalor isn't what it was, nor for that matter is estuarial squalor – an awful lot of the coast has been cleaned up to the wretchedly sterile standards of the English Tourist Board (though there are still people living in

beached boats at West Mersea, and on the Portsmouth side of Hayling, and at Bembridge on the Isle of Wight. The tradition of Peggotty and of John Mills in Robert Hamer's film *The Long Memory* has not yet been entirely erased).

Dennis Hardy and Colin Ward have produced an excellently researched book. I guess I'd have enjoyed a bit more 'oral testimony', a bit more on the actual architecture of the settlements, and a bit less on planning laws; but this is altogether an admirable work and a very timely one – as Britain becomes more divided, more factional, more like a third-world nation, the example of the plotlanders may be one to follow. Perhaps, after all, it could happen again; I suspect that Mr Patrick Jenkin and aesthetes of his ilk would actually rather approve if it happened again.

Arcadia For All: The Legacy Of A Makeshift Landscape by Dennis Hardy and Colin Ward

1985

Howard's Way: Cities and Garden Cities

Neither the gifted Herr Seifert – whose comprehension of mass is as great as his sensibility is heightened, his manner clipped and his acumen renowned – nor cavalier 'Sir' Basil Spence – whose prodigious talents are as evident as was the lupus on the face of poor Mirabeau – neither of these humble men, with their richly individualistic approaches to their art and their grave concern for our skylines, has yet succeeded in altering either our capital or indeed any of our provincial centres to the extent that the architects of the nineteenth century did. London, despite the attentions of latter day Medicis like Harry Hyams, cheerful Joe Levy and other influential patrons of our marvellous public artists, is still a city of predominantly Victorian buildings and is still capable, in all but a few especially bruised quarters, of taking further ferro concrete and glass punishment; this is regrettable, but that it's true is undeniable. London has always lacked homogeneity and so has always been able to, and still can, absorb whatever may be forced upon her in a way that, say, Paris cannot – witness the rape of Montparnasse; still that's an uncharacteristic aberration, most of Paris's more monstrous modern buildings have been confined to suburbs such as St Cloud and La Défense or to perimeters of the city proper in areas like Menilmontant. That we lack the means to appreciate even the faintest drop of the spirit of Haussmann is self-evident – how otherwise could we have done what we did to Regent Street? That we lacked a Baudelaire becomes evident in reading B. I. Coleman's anthology which, being unillustrated, has to make do without a contribution from Doré, one of whose etchings told more than any number of words from the best of them including Poe whose 'Man in the Crowd', whether or not it's

'accurate' in the way a social historian might wish, presents a far more graphic representation of The City than do any of the excerpts collected here, Disraeli's and Dickens's included; that succinct tale which anticipates the expressionists by a century and which has perhaps been left out because its author was American is not the only omission to which the present reviewer will find it necessary to draw attention with his wagging finger.

Though he's loath to admit it, Mr Coleman seems to have set out to achieve two ends: to present on the one hand a representative selection of critiques by the Victorians and their immediate predecessors of most aspects of the city as they saw it and on the other to demonstrate the few strengths and manifold weaknesses of the utopian writing of the period. Of course the borderline between the two is as hazy as a low-lifer's head the morning after a hard night at Cremorne (which gardens, incidentally, receive not a mention here), and it's trying to attempt to separate one from the other; further it must be pretty clear that the degree of popular acceptance of the rapidly expanding metropolis and of the brash new towns of the Midlands and North fluctuated from decade to decade, reaching a high point somewhere around mid-century when numerous commentators found it in themselves, if not to enthuse about the spreading of the wens, at least to recognize that it was an irreversible trend and to set about offering criticism which didn't bemoan the coming of the cities and, in the same breath, draw attention to the regenerative powers of nature and the unspoiled countryside. Still Zeit and Geist, as is their uncanny wont, turned a full circle and by the end of the century we find the acceptance of urbanism waning but replaced not by a desire to turn the clock back to Morris's guild-ridden Merrye Englande but by the deceptively hard-headed thinking of Ebenezer Howard who sought to combine the 'magnets' of town and country in the city whose blueprint he set down in *Tomorrow: a Peaceful Path to Real Reform* which since its second edition has been known as *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*. If one considers Howard in the light of the title of the series to which Coleman's anthology belongs, 'Birth of Modern Britain', then it might not be over-rash to opine that

he's the most influential of the persons whose stuff is to be found here. He wasn't an especially good writer, nor was he a particularly original thinker; an unshakeable conviction in the importance of his vision, a very real talent for translating the fancifully idealistic into the obviously realizable and a huge store of diplomatic patience – it's these qualities that enabled him, more than any other individual, to shape the appearance of Britain in the first half of this century. I'm sure he was shocked by what he saw being done – he didn't die till 1928 – in the name of the Garden City which, if he didn't invent, he championed and popularized; nevertheless the evidence is there for all to see, the countless suburbs of Breckglades, Roneths, Clovellys, mind boggling villas – the names of which celebrate their inhabitants' names, the place where they honeymooned or the secluded spot where they first coupled – each one proclaiming its individuality in the layout of its garden, the narrative of the stained glass in its front door, the sound of the music of its bell (this is true minimal art); all the extraordinary, very English, wrongly despised dormitory areas of the years between the wars owe more than anyone (notably Mumford and other laureates of the planned, balanced environment) has cared to point out to their architects' and their builders' perhaps callous, certainly avaricious misreading of Howard's muddy utopia at Letchworth just as the houses themselves, amidst their sea of cypresses and crazy paving, often appear to be the result of a too cursory glance at Cotswold cottages or at the Studio's rundown of the latest advances in teutonic modernism.

Obviously it was not Mr Coleman's task to concern himself with architectural modes; however, he does fail to indicate the genesis of our present surroundings by lack of recognition of the importance of the often quirky and apparently whimsical plans of the late Victorians. He does point out that: 'the loosening of the city texture which some foresaw has occurred', but equally he does not show – and this seems to me to be the book's chief weakness – that what were, till about the last decade of the nineteenth century, merely tributaries became the mainstream of thought and practice. He thrusts upon us a few excerpts from Howard's book – all

fundamentalist optimism and fury – but does not make it clear that Howard wrote under the influence of several men of previous generations, notably Edward Bellamy, who was also one of Morris's later masters, Thomas Spence and J. S. Buckingham. He also fails to link Howard, in any but the most indirect way, with the working class movement – this despite the fact that Letchworth was but an infant at the moment of Campbell Bannerman's landslide in 1906 and, further, that both Howard and the chief architect of the first garden city, Raymond Unwin, were disciples of Thomas Davidson and his Fellowship of the New Life of which none other than Ramsay MacDonald had, albeit briefly, been secretary. The Fellowship concerned itself with – what else? – the creation of communal paradises for its members, most of its sites being in the environs of Euston. One of the offshoots of the society, the English Land Colonization Society, drew up copious and optimistic plans, as had Thomas Spence a hundred years previously, for a 'just' division of land. Howard outlined and achieved a company which would not part with the freehold of land it leased at rates low enough to enable the poorest paid workers to benefit from the advantages of his city in the country, but he depended upon rapid decentralization which, of course, never occurred and so Letchworth, originally conceived to a plan which more than resembles that of the mid-century MP James Buckingham's ideal city of Victoria, became and has remained primarily a rather bizarre commuter town.

In the four and a half years between the publication of his manifesto and the start of the building of Letchworth, Howard formed the Garden City Association (now the Town and Country Planning Association) and held numerous meetings and conferences to publicize his plans. One of these was held at Bournville and another at Port Sunlight and both Edward Cadbury and W. H. Lever were members of the Board of First Garden City Ltd; and while it's important to emphasize the difference between the garden cities (Howard was associated only with Letchworth and Welwyn) and their poor bastard brothers the garden suburbs there's no point in denying the common elements in lineage. Pevsner, in *An Outline of European Architecture*, remarks – I haven't a copy to hand so beg

the good professor's indulgence in not quoting him – that the garden cities and suburbs are within the same picturesque tradition as Nash's Metropolitan Improvements. This is an uncharacteristically wild assertion from a hand not notable for its waywardness. It is not only in intention that the suburbs are a world apart from Nash's grand plan (or opportunistic speculation); only a commentator desperately keen to fit artefact to predetermined paradigm could find anything more than a tinny echo of the terraces of Regent's Park and of Carlton House in Welwyn's toy-town Georgian. Appearances apart, Nash built for the upper bourgeoisie while Howard and Unwin conceived of their city as being inhabited by the lower middle classes (Howard was a Law Courts stenographer). Pevsner might have been nearer the mark had he cited Nash's whimsical Blaise Hamlet as a precursor of, say, Port Sunlight; a dozen cottages *ornés* grouped around a green, asymmetrical, faintly gothic, models or maybe parodies of real rural residences. They do indeed anticipate the layout of Lever's colony and that of the original parts of Letchworth. But where Pevsner is misleading is in his automatic association of garden suburbs with the picturesque style. Most of these suburbs were built during the heyday of the domestic revival and, hardly surprisingly, are in that style, the contemporary vernacular. Lie is given to Pevsner's assertion by Robert Owen's New Lanark (early industrial revolution institutional), Titus Salt's Saltaire (neo-Italianate of the Fifties) and Crittall's Silver End which was just about the last manifestation in bricks of the socialist millionaire philanthropic tradition (international modern of the middle Thirties). Of course it would be unwise to ignore the similarities which exist between Nash's functional folly or Georgian model villages like Milton Abbas, Harewood and Old Warden and the suburbs of a century later; but equally it would be foolish to attribute the 'invention' or at least the popularization of the domestic revival to propagandists of the garden suburb – stylistically architecture had described a full circle in the years intervening between the construction of Blaise Hamlet (c1810) and that of Bedford Park in 1876 and hadn't got much further when during the

1920s every jerry-builder doing houses in the Croynge-rustic manner was calling his development a garden suburb.

The last thing that the title *Marble Halls* suggests is the emphatic cosiness of Bedford Park and one is led to wonder if Maurice Adam's plan with notes (1897) of the suburb and Norman Shaw's elevation of the Tabard Inn were included because they were easily available to John Physick and Michael Derby, the organizers of the excellent V & A exhibition of which this volume is the catalogue. Bedford Park aroused great interest when it was built, not least on account of the squabbles between Edward Godwin, the original architect, and Jonathan Carr whose speculation it was; it is still one of the most pleasant spots for a ramble that exists in London (though adjacent and similar Chiswick Village with its superior and later church closely rivals it) and if the liberal inhabitants of its early days have been replaced by pukka burghers it doesn't really show; somehow everything, save the trees which are now over luxuriant, seems to have stood still and were Chesterton to revisit his fantastic suburb, his Saffron Park, he would probably be not altogether displeased. Just how slanted a picture he gave of it in *The Man Who Was Thursday* is difficult to assess, it's quite probable that he was playing to a gallery of easily shockable and perhaps prurient readers who knew of the suburb only through contemporary reports in newspapers of little repute which assumed a pose of worthy commonsense in the bearded faces of the sandalled and vegetarian free thinking bolshies who are alleged to have inhabited its pseudo sylvan and truly redbrick groves; to judge from Maurice Adam's list of residents such a picture is vastly inaccurate. So too is that painted by Buchan in *Mr Standfast*: Hannay, on the track of a Hun agent during the 1914–18 war is led to Biggleswick, an analogue for Letchworth, and discovers that the agent is none other than the spiritual leader of an odd group who profess a variety of disciplines including those of Theosophy, 'Anarchy', Communism, Henry George, *etc.* Buchan's forte was certainly not satire and his attempt at it is callous and patronizing, which doesn't matter, and imprecise, which does – still he did possess an enormous descriptive and narrative gift and this thriller is quite compelling; he succeeds,

somewhat perversely one might think, in rendering the institutes, 'free spaces' and discussion groups of Biggleswick rather sinister.

Whatever the stylistic genealogy of the domestic revival (and that should present the student with no problems at all) its spiritual roots obviously lie in a fierce reaction against the characteristic qualities of the architecture one normally associates with 'Marble Halls' – this architecture, forbidding, frightening, indicative of a strong and intolerant and perhaps bestial order, faintly megalomaniac, reached its apogee in the Sixties in the work of Teulon and Waterhouse; I don't think one needs to have seen *Psycho* with its gothic/stick house of terror in order to experience some awe at the sight of monstrous wedges, towers, pavilions, gables and spirelets (apparently) promiscuously heaped alongside one another in alarming and, so it often seems, gravity defying juxtaposition. Maybe it's this last quality which holds the key to the eerie appeal of the High Victorian fantasies – somehow someone with a preposterous combination of showmanship masked as piety and materialistic fervour has with legerdemain contravened the natural order. If it seems odd to refer to the 'natural order' when talking of the effects of a building on a spectator then let me add straightaway that there is perhaps something inherent in the mimetic process in revivalist art – the revenge, no doubt, of the dead and plagiarized – which makes for a built-in imbalance; add to this the flagrant eclecticism of an architect like Clutton (apt handle) and the result has the same compulsive appeal as a pair of Siamese twins in a jar of brine. Maybe the appeal of canals is analogous, for whereas no river nor no 'genuine' gothic (including the rigorously imitative 'correct' work of, say, the elder Pugin) or Renaissance building ever put fear in my heart, canals, the more so those which are higher than the roads beside them, are often terrifying as are the chapel at Lancing or the skyline of St Pancras as one tramps in the late afternoon over the heights of lower Holloway towards the site of the old Caledonian Market.

James Bunstone Bunning, the architect of the market, certainly left his mark on the area, being also the designer of the superbly castellated and probably very grim Holloway Gaol

only half a mile away. Alas it's the market which exists no longer; while it was pretty much on its last legs it was dourly evoked by S. Beckett in *Murphy* and since then several of its buildings have been demolished and its wide open spaces filled by squalid, ugly blocks of council flats – still the four pubs which mirror each other at the corners have been allowed to remain as has, mercifully, the Venetian clock tower whose proximity to the 'architect' designed flats not only points – as if another accusatory finger is needed at this late stage – to the shoddiness, the pitiful lack of flair and invention of the flats' creator but, absolutely unexpectedly, causes the passer by to pause and momentarily wonder if he has not walked into a painting by the egotistical Italian De Chirico. I don't know what the future holds for what remains of the market; it is to be hoped that it may be spared the probable fate of another of Bunning's buildings, Billingsgate Fish Market, over which hovers the vulture Seifert ready to swoop at the first call of the market authority. Will intrepid Anthony Crosland intervene . . . the name of that debonair minister seems eminently associable with some lines by Cowper which Mr Coleman reproduces at the heart of his anthology:

> . . . She [the city] is rigid in denouncing death
> On petty robbers, and indulges life
> And liberty, and off-times honour too
> To peculators of the public gold.

The Idea of the City in Nineteenth Century Britain ed. B. I. Coleman
Marble Halls by John Physick and Michael Derby

1974

Lutyens (1): Dream Days

The summer that I was 12 years old I went to play in a cricket match at Marsh Court which Edwin Lutyens designed for an Edwardian adventurer called Herbert Johnson in 1901 and which had long since been turned into a prep school. I have no recollection of my performance (a duck and some dropped catches, no doubt) nor of the team's performance (an ignominious nine wicket defeat, no doubt). I do however have the strongest recollection of my reaction to that vast house: I was convinced that it had the air of something met in a gorgeous dream, and the congruity of the house with its gardens seemed sheerly rapturous. No building I had ever seen had affected me thus – and despite having had the good fortune to spend much of my childhood (literally) in the shadow of Salisbury Cathedral whose Close is an anthology of domestic architectural styles. As I walked round Marsh Court I found that it seemed to transform itself from one building into another and yet another. The effect is *not* akin to that of buildings like, say, Castle Goring in Sussex which has one gothic fortress façade and one chastely classical façade. It is far more subtle – like going through the looking glass.

Later I read a reference to Marsh Court and some of the architect's other domestic stuff of that period as 'dream houses'. I think the writer was Priestley. I knew very well that he was not talking about the sort of 'dream house' that you win in competitions in *The Sun* (in two one-syllable words tell us what you'd like to do to Page Three girl Lorraine). He was, rather, suggesting that these houses might have about them the logic and movement and seamless metamorphoses that characterize dreams and, further, that they might be the products of benign hallucinations – if R. L. Stevenson could

dream Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde then could not Edwin Lutyens dream his great houses?

Later still the copiously illustrated Roderick Gradidge published a copiously illustrated book on the work of Lutyens and some of his contemporaries and called it *Dream Houses*. But no, he had taken his title from another source and, rather oddly, one which used the phrase as a term of deprecation suggesting that they were insubstantial and illusory as all things in dreams are . . . There may be something in this – Lutyens's best early work has a prettiness and a sort of fastidiousness that all but teeter into sweetness and tweeness. And of course illusion, tricks, visual 'puns', sleights of hand were legitimate architectural gambits till the solemn ascetics of the Modern Movement took over – and no architect ever revelled in playing games with eye and brain more than Lutyens. You find in him the same jolliness and lightness of touch that you find in the early 'social' novels of his almost exact contemporary H. G. Wells. (Lutyens 1869–1944, Wells 1866–1946.) The reputations of both men went into decline before they died and went on sinking after their deaths. Both were victims of fashion and the fashion of the day was Modernism – so Wells was reviled as a mere (mere!) story teller and Lutyens as someone who had 'sold out' to classicism and, worse, monumental classicism. Every generation rejects its predecessor, nothing odd or wrong about that – what was odd and *very wrong* was the way in which a generation of *public* artists (if you can call the wretches artists) wilfully destroyed the tradition of which Lutyens was the greatest jewel and replaced it with trash 'architecture' that has proved aesthetically ignoble and socially catastrophic. Lutyens saw it coming; in 1932 he wrote: 'Cracking glass and crazing cements are not worthy materials on which to base a style, nor is it possible to achieve with them a proud permanence.' Another thing that must have caused him to mistrust Modernism was its introspection.

Lutyens was artistically and socially extrovert and had little time for 'isms'. His formal education was slight and his architectural education was a sort that would today be regarded as laughable. He set up by himself when he was 20 years old and by the turn of the century had behind him a

body of work notable for its freshness and its reliance on what architects insist on calling the 'vernacular' tradition, i.e. the practical craftsmanlike tradition of a particular area (in his case Surrey, yet to be suburbanized) which until the industrialization of building was, typically, passed down from father to son. Such a tradition provided him with a starting point only – he was not a formulaic architect like his lesser contemporary Charles Voysey, he was full of fancy.

After the turn of the century his work gradually became more formal and drew increasingly upon the markedly English classicism that everyone knows as Georgian. Later still he worked in a peculiar classical style that he called 'the high game' (bad pun). Of course all these 'periods' overlap and of course they are art-historical artifices. Till a few years ago orthodox opinion held that the first, 'vernacular' period was jolly good and that thereafter it was downhill all the way. Critical prejudice against classicism tended to blind people to the fact that Lutyens's classical exercises were as inventive and clever as his earlier stuff. Whoops, let one out of the bag there – clever.

Lutyens *was* clever and of course it doesn't do to be clever in this country – worthiness, good intentions, plodding doggedness, 'sincerity' – these are the qualities that *really* matter. Lutyens was, well, a bit showy in the way that Oscar Wilde was showy – there was nothing oafish about the way he broke rules, he did it with an aplomb that was never solecistic.

Classicism, cleverness – there was a third thing that did for Lutyens's reputation, and that was Empire. To the zealous young fellow-travelling architects of the 30s who grew up to be the concerned authors of post-war Britain and receive titles for their happy vandalism nothing could have appeared more reactionary than Lutyens's work at New Delhi. No matter that his main interest in the perpetuity of the British Empire was that it gave him, as Sir Nikolaus Pevsner has pointed out, the opportunity to work on a monumental scale that he could never have attempted at home. He was perhaps the only good architect of this century to have had the chance to do things on such a scale. Perhaps even that is a source of resentment.

You have to understand this: The equation of 'good' art and 'progressive' art is a fairly recent one. And the 'establishment's' espousal and patronage of 'progressive' art is even more recent. The old avant garde *is* the establishment now and the new avant garde (inappropriate handle) reveres the old establishment.

An interesting figure in this great turn about is Sir Hugh Casson, a bespectacled old party, whose architectural reputation is based upon his London Zoo elephant house (reptile house might have been more apt) and his having helped to so improve Bath, and whose public reputation relies on his having been one of those dynamic purposeful figures with a seat on every committee and an opinion on every topic that had to do with 'the arts'.

Only the educationally subnormal will confuse 'the arts' with art. The latter has something to do with individual effort (or the efforts of a few individuals), inspiration and talent; the former has all to do with jobbery, manoeuvres in quangoland, being Humphrey Burton or Hugh Casson or that Wheldon man, making the right noises, fund raising, the Royal Fine Arts Commission etc.

No doubt Casson's presence on the Lutyens Exhibition Committee will come as no surprise to those used to his hughbiquitous name. But it strikes me that it is a bit like seeing the name of a recidivist on a board of prison governors. You have to wonder why Casson, who is President of the Royal Academy, prevaricated for a year after the idea of a Lutyens exhibition at the Academy had been mooted. Could it have been because the exhibition of a former President's extraordinarily prolific career might have made his own achievements look slight? Perish the thought. It probably has to do with something far more obscure, like who would get credit for the 'rediscovery' of this 'neglected master'.

I really don't know who will claim the title. Piers Gough who has designed the exhibition deserves much credit for having managed to transform what is possibly the nastiest gallery in Europe, the Hayward, into something that is actually agreeable to be in. He has done this by a combination of Lutyens pastiche and sheer outrage. I have to admit that the

installation was by no means complete when I saw it – had it been complete I should probably now be using words like 'important' and 'seminal' about it.

1981

Lutyens (2): He Meets His Bakerloo

The sumptuous fatuity of the idea that a particular architecture is the expression of a particular form of government is signally demonstrated at New Delhi, which was conceived in 1911 (by its royal, viceroyal and political begetters, at least) as the apogee of Empire and Raj, but which was by the time of its inauguration two decades later acknowledged as a symbol of the coming republic. *Pace* Toniben and his acolytes most things are not political. *Pace* all those determinist architectural critics of the last half-century architecture must be judged *aesthetically*: it is foolish for instance to write off the work of Stalin's and Hitler's and Mao's men just because we abhor genocide – we might as well refuse to eat piroshki and sauerkraut and dim sum on the same spurious grounds. Edwin Lutyens was not taken in by the red herring of Empire, though his collaborator (if that is an apt word for someone with whom he was for a long time on famously bad terms) Herbert Baker was. Lutyens had the opportunistic innocence and promiscuity of a great artist; he was not much interested in the cause that his buildings were supposed to capture in stone. He was too wise not to know that great buildings often last longer than the regimes they are intended to glorify; he built for his own sake and for architecture's sake. I do not believe that this is irresponsible or blind. We do not need to approve the patron to approve the artist's work – after a certain passage of time (not necessarily very long) the gangster pope and the mad monarch and the despotic merchant are forgotten and all that remains is what they commissioned, now unsullied by regrettable but irrelevant associations. The Raj was not of course like the gangster pope etc., but Lutyens's greatest creation must be thought of as separate from it just as those palaces

and paintings and concertos are separate from the men for whom they were got; this is how Lutyens thought of his work at Delhi and for once an artist's own estimate of his work was right.

The work of Lutyens's collaborator, Herbert Baker, must be judged by the same standard though Baker had very different aspirations. By his own admission he sought to 'put the stamp of British sovereignty' on India; his intentions were, then, not merely aesthetic. Baker was by no means a bad architect but the speciousness of his equation of classicism of a Mogul flavour with 'British sovereignty' is made clear when you compare his work at Delhi with what he had done just a few years before at the Union Buildings in Pretoria – there is a marked similarity of form and disposition to the Secretariat blocks, it's just the accent which is different. Beside Lutyens's synthesis of European and Northern Indian forms in the Viceroy's House Baker's stuff looks like an awkward arranged marriage. Lutyens made no secret of his contempt for Baker's preoccupation with the almost literal rendering of native devices, though this of course is not what caused the great rift between them.

Anyone who has read even a few of the many articles on Lutyens that have appeared during the last few months must be sick to death with hearing about how he met his 'Bakerloo'. For some reason that even Mr Irving, a most zealous researcher, is unable to explain, Lutyens overlooked the effect that the gradient of the road between Baker's two Secretariats would have upon the view of the Viceroy's House. The effect was this; the gradient was so steep that about three-quarters of a mile from the Viceroy's House the approaching traveller loses sight of the house's portico and its dome is left sitting on top of the slope. When Lutyens realized what was going on it was too late. He made a thorough nuisance of himself petitioning anyone who would listen and many who wouldn't in an effort to have the slope made more gentle – a succession of Viceroys and Vicereines, the King and Queen, MPs – all of them had to hear his quite justified but inevitably tiresome and monotonous complaint, his threats to resign, his petulant deprecations of his former friend's abilities. Mr Irving makes

the point that the experience of proceeding along King's Way towards the Viceroy's House is a Picturesque one rather than Baroque or Beaux-Arts. This may sound like a bit of art-historical nitpicking but is actually most important. The Picturesque is serial, linear, episodic while the Baroque and the Beaux-Arts work towards a single goal; the effect of the gradient is to deflect the eye from the intended goal towards more immediate objects of focus and so turn that intended goal into the last of a series of visual stimuli rather than an inevitable magnet. It is really rather surprising that given the Imperial and potent preoccupations of the various councils and committees to which Lutyens appealed the decision was not taken to alter the gradient and so achieve what was obviously a more 'authoritarian' vista. In her memoir of her father (1980) Mary Lutyens writes: 'We were brought up to look on Baker as a villain who had ruined Father's life's work. It is only now that I realize what a small matter the gradient really was and how little the loss of the level way detracts from the glory of Father's achievement.' Mr Irving is less sanguine: 'After sixty years, "Mistake of Conception", the very label both architects hoped to spare New Delhi, is writ large across Raisina Hill.'

Much of this painstakingly detailed book is taken up with stuff about committees, civil servants, members of the Viceroy's Council etc. – not very exciting I'm afraid, and the author is better at gathering material than at marshalling it. He tends to repeat himself, imparting, in some cases, the same bit of information on several different occasions. Further, the book's bias towards Lutyens's great palace and Baker's less great Secretariats means that the rest of the city is paid insufficient attention and the work of less celebrated architects like Robert Russell, Henry Medd, Walter George, and Arthur Shoosmith is dealt with a bit summarily. Mr Irving calls Shoosmith's Garrison Church 'the most remarkable in India' and it is certainly a work of marked potency and strength. This bias towards Lutyens and Baker and towards the exclusion of the rest of the city is matched in the photographs; there are however some delightful illustrations including, opposite the title-page, a painting by Marjorie Shoosmith in

the style of a Rajput miniature depicting the completion of New Delhi. In it Lutyens is handing over to the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, a model of the palace and Baker is hovering behind.

What Mr Irving does convey with some authority is a sense of Lutyens as fixer. For all his jolliness and childlike ways he was a consummate politician with a not altogether admirable gamut of stratagems, an absolutely resolute conviction of his own greatness, and a sort of subtlety of mind that, had he employed it to your disadvantage, you might have called shiftiness. Beside him Baker is a nugatory figure – decent and ordinary. Mr Irving has a better talent for biography than he perhaps realizes and it is a pity that he did not use it more. Despite these misgivings *Indian Summer* is a good book and one that will of course long remain the standard work on this particular architectural adventure.

The other book reviewed here is the catalogue of the Lutyens exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, a loathsome place which was marvellously transformed by Piers Gough, who deserves some sort of award for services to exhibition design. The catalogue gives no indication of the extent or quality of Mr Gough's work nor does it, being the record of and guide to an essentially *visual* event, give much idea of what Lutyens was like. No matter; what is important is the man's work and the book provides an excellent introduction to it. There are good brief essays by Jane Brown and John Cornforth on, respectively, Lutyens's relationships with Gertrude Jekyll and with Edward Hudson, the founder of *Country Life*, both of which show that he had a great way of getting taken up by people who might help him; there is a largely impenetrable piece by Sir John Summerson on Liverpool Cathedral which he concludes with the felicitous assertion that a building 'can assume a place of authority in the world of architecture without actually being built'; there is an essay on Delhi by Gavin Stamp which tells with elegance and economy the same story as Robert Grant Irving. Neither the catalogue nor the exhibition shows Lutyens's buildings in the grounds of the Viceroy's House, the so-called Schedule B, i.e., staff and band quarters, and the houses for the Viceroy's Private Secretary and Surgeon. These are well illustrated in *Indian Summer* and

show Lutyens designing in a manner close to that of his devotee Oliver Hill – using predominantly mid-Georgian devices in a Regency stucco skin; this seems an admirable hot weather formula and is also interesting because it suggests what Lutyens was inclined to do in India when under no compulsion to do things the 'eastern' way and what, indeed, he might have done had he been initially briefed by a less diplomatic Viceroy than Lord Hardinge. It is quite clear that he resented having to do anything outside the bounds of European classicism (even though the product of such an excursion was his greatest monument) and it is equally clear that he exhibited a xenophobic blindness to Indian architecture, both Muslim and Hindu. I suspect that he never saw the temples of Orissa.

In 1948 Clough Williams Ellis wrote to Christopher Hussey, who was then engaged on what remains the most comprehensive record of Lutyens's work, that: 'There will of course be an eclipse. To the young architects of today and tomorrow, imbued with the new *zeitgeist*, with their sociological and functional outlook, the Lutyens tradition will no doubt appear remote, irrelevant and démodé.' It is some measure of the failure of those young architects of today and tomorrow (old and titled and bitter, now) that Lutyens's star should have risen so long before the passing of the century that Clough Williams Ellis gave it. But it has more, I think, to do with the perkiness and irrepressibility of genius which, whatever 'ism' it may be thought to represent, is always found to be representative of nothing but itself.

Indian Summer: Lutyens, Baker, and Imperial Delhi by Robert Grant Irving
Lutyens: The Work of the English Architect Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869–1944) ed. Colin Amery and Margaret Richardson

1982

Fancy Frogging: The Beaux-Arts

The heterogeneous collection of essays that comprises this book justifies, almost despite itself, the rather boastful title; moreover it gives an interesting though blurred picture of 'official' thought and taste of the period. I say 'despite itself' because much of the writing is clogged and dreary, untouched by irony or by stylistic felicities. This is a pity. It is, perhaps, unreasonable to expect of all architectural scholars the elegance of Summerson or Girouard, but it is surely not unreasonable to expect of them something other than prose wrought by fists: seriousness of intent is *not* mitigated by lightness of touch. Further, the historiographic preoccupations of some of the contributors are a bore. Maybe the awkwardness is attributable to these pieces having been originally presented as papers at an Architectural Association conference and having been insufficiently reworked. (It occurs to me that some of them may appear here in translation, though no translator is mentioned.) Still, one cannot question their thoroughness and only a churl would deprecate the authors' talent for accumulation of detail. The trouble is that one hasn't been softened up first. There are no such happy introductions to French 19th-century architecture as Betjeman's *First and Last Loves* or Peter Ferriday's agreeable collection of essays on the Victorians. These prepared one for the hardcore stuff when it came along with its excess baggage of footnotes and quibbles and its conviction of worth through humourlessness. The climate has changed; the enthusiasm of the passionate amateur (which word I intend in its primary though uncolloquial sense) like Betjeman has regrettably been replaced by the grant-aided zeal of the 'professional' art historian with his eye

on a field to make his own and, if all goes well, a museum of, say, *dérailleur* gears to be curator of.

It is not merely because the climate has changed that there is no notably accessible introduction to French 19th-century stuff, it is also because it has very little to attract the amateur. It has none of the waywardness or the folly or the absurdity or even the sheer might of contemporary British architecture. What it does have is a theoretical basis or a series of theoretical bases of differing degrees of coherence. Well, we had Pugin and Ruskin; but British architects of their age (including Pugin) tended to go their own sweet ways. Buildings, these scholars need reminding, are made from brick and stone and iron and not from words; these essays are as much about architectural writing as they are about architectural practice and art. The buildings, as I say, are not that remarkable. But that, perhaps, is not the point.

The Beaux-Arts was much more than a mere school. The term also implies an aesthetic programme, a method of work, an agency of arbitration in matters of taste, even an architectural 'philosophy'. Again, it has during the last 50-odd years been used almost exclusively in a deprecatory sense – just like 'academic' (with which it has become loosely synonymous). It implies formality and rather pudding-like classicism – I know it *shouldn't*, but it does. This book is not really 'accessible' enough to amend these prejudices. One reason why there is such an emphasis on theory is that French architects were forbidden to undertake the countless simultaneous commissions that characterized the big British practices like Scott's or Waterhouse's. They had time on their hands to teach and to talk life and architecture and to prepare manifestoes – it was all rather like the position that young British modernists found themselves in during the 1930s, and they too have attracted a lot of rather dense commentaries.

The stars of the show are: first, Neil Levine's essay on the relationship of Labrouste's Bibliothèque Ste-Geneviève ('une machine à lire') to the chapter of Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* entitled 'Ceci tuera Cela'; second, a piece by the editor Robin Middleton on J.-I. Hittorff's proselytizing on behalf of decorative polychromy – lots of nice colour plates are included and

one has to regret that Hittorff was not more successful, though I suppose you could say that his example was realized by cinema and factory architects of the 1920s; and third, a knowing article on the Beaux-Arts' place in the classical tradition by Joseph Rykwert.

Rykwert shows that the most influential teaching in the school was outside that tradition since it denied the two fundaments of the orders – that they relate to the body and that they suggest something primitive, archetypal. Rykwert goes so far as to suggest that, on the contrary, the school was the embodiment of a revolutionary ideal – that of starting from scratch along 'rational' lines that refer to no tradition. *Plus ça change*. Actually it doesn't. The possibility of that was obviated by the school's method of instruction – a point that Rykwert rather crudely illustrates by observing that when Julien Guadet made his thoroughly reactionary (though by no means meagre) inaugural lecture on his appointment as Professor of Architectural Theory in 1894 Van Gogh, Seurat, and Gauguin were all dead. This is specious as well as crude; it hints at a belief in *progress* in architecture, which is not the same thing as change. No matter, Rykwert's is an assured performance and one which will be of interest to the non-specialist.

Neil Levine, in his polymathic investigation into the *literariness* of the iconography of the Bibliothèque Ste-Geneviève, cannot be accused of appealing to the non-specialist; his prose is constellated with art-historical patois. But to complain of such a thing is to play the ingrate. His scholarship is formidable and he has the gift of being able to make us look at that building through the eyes of the period it was made for; similarly he gives us Hugo uninterpreted by Geoffrey Scott. This is architectural history as time-travel, or whatever they call it in physics-fiction.

The Beaux-Arts and Nineteenth-Century French Architecture ed. Robin Middleton

1982

Keeping The Bastards In Check: The 'Aesthetic Control' of Architecture

The very term 'aesthetic control' prompts nightmares of an unspeakable future, all homogeneity and state-run crèches; it is, of course, a euphemism designed to disguise a rather tawdry endeavour. 'Appearance censorship' is more apt, though understandably less likely to meet with the favour of those whose lot in life it is to exercise such censorship; 'aesthetic' does sound a bit, well, grand. It also suggests subjectivity and a subjective gauge is no gauge at all; taste is not reducible to expression in formulae. The taste of someone working in a local authority planning office should be of absolutely no moment to anyone but himself and his loved ones. That is one way of looking at it.

Another is simply to point to our cities and to the systematic corporate vandalism they have suffered over the last 30 years and to reel back screaming that there has to be some sort of control in order to prevent it happening all over again. And why should it be prevented? In the public interest, of course.

The 'public interest' means whatsoever you want it to mean. The very fact that each individual soul defines it differently surely demonstrates its speciousness. In this context it can be, and often is, invoked to justify strapping manacles around a man who dares to make alterations to his home and, equally, to provide a glider for the road engineer who seeks to shove a grey snake through our green and pleasant. It is quite clear that whatever other properties they have our planning laws exhibit no sense of proportion.

Now, what has happened in this country during the last 30 years has happened under the most stringent planning controls in the world. One does not need the mane and brain of Michael Heseltine to come to his conclusion that in urban

areas 'aesthetic control' has failed to ensure that surroundings of a decent standard are achieved and that this failure has been most costly financially. How much of the responsibility for the morass devolves on architects and how much on planners is eternally arguable; it is almost certain, however, that historians of the city in the third quarter of this century will note that the building boom coincided with a period when architecture was neither happy nor humane and when puritanical strictures against ornament were being realized in practice. So high quantity went hand in hand with low quality. What then is the point of employing an expensive nanny if she fails to slap the bad boys and thus encourages the good boys to behave in a similarly perverse manner?

The terrace is not peculiarly British but its application is far more widespread in this country than it is anywhere else in the world; it is an urban ideal which is held up as an examplar even a century or so after it has ceased to be a norm. In this ideal, according to Michael Manser who has campaigned here, there and elsewhere against appearance controls, is to be found the genesis of such controls. The terrace's artifice is to appear a whole; to destroy part of it, one of its actual units, and to replace it with something different is rather akin to inserting a chapter written in, say, Dutch into an English novel. The trouble, Manser and many other architects feel, is that development control is increasingly exercised by planners who regard towns and districts (or whatever they have control over) as if they were terraces and so apply to them anomalous strictures. They tend to find a homogeneity where none exists. Hence the grotesque conceit of 'the vernacular'; it should be, but regrettably isn't, clear to anyone that indigenous local styles disappeared with the industrial revolution in all but a few areas which are now museums of themselves. The use of 'vernacular' with reference to the green pantiles and *Daily Mail* windows of a 30s suburb is quite preposterous – the predominant character of vast tracts of these islands owes everything to speculative builders, persuasive builders' suppliers and visits to the Ideal Home exhibition. For the results of such chance and combination to be held up as models for future generations is really rather silly. But held up they are;

and so to be 'in keeping' (a supremely vague notion) is too often the *conditio sine qua non* of the successful submission. Design guides, of course, bolster this dubious rule.

Those which have been published in the wake of the Essex guide have tended more to mirror that guide than to say anything about the districts for which they are intended. The result is a sort of institutionalized folksiness – akin to the way that folk-singers from Darlington and Daventry and Dawlish all nowadays sing in the same bogus 'regional' accent (which pertains to no region).

No one should be surprised by this. Design guides seem to have been invested in some areas with an authority far beyond that which their name suggests and have become quasi-statutory pattern books. (There's nothing wrong with pattern books which were in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries devised by the architect for the lay client and his builder – nowadays it seems to be the other way round, the stipulations being set by non-designers.) But they are a positive disincentive to innovation, to fantasy and – most importantly – to trying hard; they provide a common mean which may preclude the erection of some truly horrible stuff but which equally deters architects from submitting anything odd.

Richard MacCormac, referring to this 'confinement of aspiration', says that, 'I'd rather see Mickey Mouse stuff, vulgarity and awfulness, because that's the price you pay for something good.' He also points out that planning officers have nothing to gain and much to lose (in terms of career prospects and so on) if they attempt to persuade 'bovine committees' of the merits of unorthodox schemes.

A complaint voiced by architects with sufficient regularity to lead one to suppose that it is not the product of creeping paranoia is that many planning officers can only get on if they are seen to turn down a certain percentage of submissions.

An East Midlands architect who is currently involved in tortuous negotiations and so wishes to remain anonymous said, 'It's job protection – they have to find something to justify themselves. So they turn out reams of bullshit.'

Leaving aside the unthinkable administrative problems that it would involve (there simply aren't enough architects) the

idea that submissions should be judged only by those with architectural qualifications is one whose basis is most questionable. The idea rather ingenuously supposes that architects sitting in judgement on the work of their fellows will be devoid of prejudice and caprice – nothing, actually, seems likely to be further from the truth; the architect/judge is liable to feel that his professional nous could well be employed in a 'creatively' critical role. This is borne out by the experiences of certain architects who have had to deal with architect-planners who, they say, are even more confident, if less ignorant, in the 'suggestions' that they make than planners with no experience in design.

The submissions of unqualified designers should, it has been mooted, be subjected to a different form of development control to those of architects. John Weller supports this notion 'in principle' though he recognizes that 'the amateur' designing an extension for himself may well turn in something better than the 'client controlled' architect who is insensitive to design but knows a lot about folding money. Jennifer Armstrong, Babergh District Council's Planning Officer, goes so far as to reckon that much of architects' current antipathy towards planners is the indirect result of planners having to deal with up to 90 per cent unqualified submissions and so delay those of architects. A system that effectively operated two standards, one for architects and another for 'the rest', would not only be inequitable, the worst sort of restrictive practice, but according to Michael Manser, one behind which 'second rate' architects could hide even more easily than that which exists now. The abolition of controls would force architects to show what they can do and so 'sort out the sheep from the men'.

Not the least drawback of lay committees (which are of course composed of self-seeking local councillors) is their frequent inability to 'read' elevations and plans. This is occasionally acknowledged by them, albeit in an unwittingly backhanded way. An architect recalls insisting on attending a meeting of a committee which was to discuss a proposed building of his. After 20 or so minutes of desultory talk he asked when the committee was going to *look* at the drawings.

'Oh,' said the chairman, 'we've got all the information we need, we don't want drawings.' The implied assumption that all visual phenomena can be verbally represented is marvellously unsound; however, were more committees to adopt this sort of double eyepatch approach a lot of welcome unorthodox proposals would stand a better chance of acceptance. As things stand those architects whose drawings are detailed and precise are the most likely to receive commensurately detailed and precise rejections – a vague blob of a silhouette backed up by a modicum of written information is, regrettably, a frequent recipe for success.

No one who studies architectural magazines can doubt that a lot of architects have learnt the value of well gauged imprecision. Indeed an architect in a provincial city told me that he enjoys a relationship with his local planning office which enables him to submit the vaguest drawings which an officer familiar with his work can 'read into'; he admits that success with planners is promoted by 'building up trust and getting to know them'. Such a set-up is, it need hardly be emphasized, one in which the quality of design is not a matter of much importance, and one in which corruption can flourish.

It is not yet known how extensive Mr Heseltine's emendations to current planning legislation will be. However, 'sources close to the minister' are emphatic that developments of less than a certain size will not be subject to control (it is of course arguable that *size* is a singularly odd criterion). This size has yet to be determined but what football managers call 'educated guesswork' prompts the conviction that many extensions and alterations for larger than the currently permissible 10 per cent to unlisted buildings may be allowed to proceed untrammelled. It is of course all too easy to sneer at the outcome of essays in 'individualization'; the invariably cited but more rarely espied carriage lamps and shutters and 'georgian' windows may cause chagrin to the architect of a once pristine scheme and offence to the neighbours and so on. Indubitably such improvements often reveal a shocking lack of taste (as well as much wonderfully misapplied ingenuity) but equally they may frequently be understood as a response, a v-sign if

you like, to the inadequacy of the original design. On the one hand there is the sort of case instanced by the good woman of Bath who painted her front door in the Royal Crescent bright yellow (the rest of the doors are black); on the other the wholesale alterations made by the occupants of Corbusier's boxes at Pessac on the edge of Bordeaux which now have a vitality and humanity which in their original 'ideal' state they lacked. (It is entirely irrelevant but interesting to remind readers that L'Unité D'Habitation is almost entirely populated by sociologists and playgroup leaders who display the works of the building's megalomaniac creator on their shelves.) Until a new architecturally decorative tradition asserts itself – it is already in its infancy – people will go on tarting up their castles; to deny them the right to do so smacks strongly of the mean paternalism which was at the root of modernism and carries the implied admission that architects design for architects. There is an uncomfortable truth that a generation of architects is being prevented from reacting against guilt-ridden, ornament-free stuff in any way other than resorting to what Banham calls 'sentimental Hoggartry' (i.e. the angular 'cottage' style) by planners who see that as the only alternative to the legacy of the man whom at least one of them has been heard to refer to as 'Le Corbusio'.

Whatever Mr Heseltine does is going to encounter a deal of firmly entrenched and well organized opposition. Several planning officers have expressed the opinion that his misgivings about the current system are essentially economic and that they are disguised in an 'aesthetic' mask in order to render the matter 'non-political'; it is hard to dispute this, nonetheless the effect will be the same. And that effect, so far as one can gauge the 'current mood' of planners, will be that different weapons in their huge battery will be deployed. It is naïve to believe that they will respond passively to diminutions of their powers. As it is, many architects must have come across a planning officer who has in conversation made it clear that his recommendation will be for refusal on the grounds of appearance but has given different reasons in writing. No doubt this may be seen as an indication of a committee opposing a submission for reasons other than those proffered

by its officer. The secretary of the Royal Fine Art Commission, Sherban Cantacuzino, has been led to believe that committees are increasingly questioning the counsel of their officers – if this is so it should be kept in mind by architects who are moved to withdraw or amend schemes on the 'recommendation' of planning officers.

Like much Tory policy of the recent past – the reorganization of the counties is the classic example – the total abandonment of controls would be profoundly anti-conservative (if you accept that conservatism is anything more than a euphemism for the politics of greed). *Laissez faire* could, almost certainly would, reveal itself as *laissez ruiner*. No planner to whom I talked while preparing this article failed to endorse this view; and no planner failed to refer to listed buildings, as if this country was composed of nothing else.

Listed buildings, conservation areas, national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty – if we are to have such things, then they must be firmly monitored. And if we are to have such things should we not, by the same token, have areas in which no controls at all should be applied – this might at least foster the revitalization of some of the sorrier corners of the country. The fatuity of those who seek to demand changes to the design of a shed on an industrial estate is to be deplored just as the bravery of those who attempt to force the abandonment of, say, London University's concrete imperialization of Bloomsbury is to be lauded.

Vastly different degrees of control are required for different areas: Slough is not Bath (though it *does* have some pretty factories in the Great West Road style). There is surely an excellent case for the abolition of controls in many areas and a tightening of them in (a few) others. This of course would have the effect of emphasizing the already marked disparity between 'tourist' Britain and the rest but it might at least act as an incentive towards the creation of a more varied and even eccentric environment, marked by buildings displaying talent rather than spuriously engendered 'regional characteristics'.

An argument for the abolition, or at least relaxation, of controls that is often trotted out goes thus: Wren, had he had

to 'build in keeping', would not have given us St Paul's . . . Such anachronistic comparisons are actually impertinent both because of the presumption implied in invoking Wren to justify some dreary box and because it is spurious, if seductive, to apply a different age's standards to our own. Notwithstanding their variously different traditions and demographic complexions other western states may be seen as measures against which we can gauge our own (lack of) freedom.

The sort of commonsensical proposals of the architect-planner Theo Crosby which prescribe nothing but height and scale are akin to those which apply in most parts of France. Britain is exceptional, and perhaps backward, in that architects frequently do not receive a planning officer's views on a site before the conception of a design for it, views which may be seen as part of the brief. It is also of moment that even a traditionally centralized country like France allows its regions more complete autonomy than does Britain, where the grant of money to an area is too often accompanied by instructions on how to spend it – which means that the expression of regional differences other than by the rehearsal of those *folklorique* modes is thwarted.

In the US 88 per cent of building is privately commissioned and financed and there is, of course, very little state or municipal meddling – once a developer has obtained a construction permit he is free to build as he wishes. In the words of Andrew Rabeneck 'the client's investment intention is respected by the community'; in other words the prevalent British notion that bureaucracy should interfere with the investment of capital is one which is antithetical to the American spirit. The equivalent of listed buildings and conservation areas does exist – landmark buildings and areas – and within the latter architects are often expected to build in a purely copyist way which is something that few British architects seem prepared to do. While the quality of much of the development that results from the lack of controls is, to British eyes, wayward it is indisputable that a varied, fantastical and genuinely popular architecture is allowed to thrive: protestantism asserts itself economically, not 'aesthetically'.

Not everything in the States is hunky-dory. In California,

especially, the last few years have seen the inception of a kind of 'ecological control' – *les verts* have swayed opinion to such an extent that if your plot is found to have a rare species of rat living on it you may be unable to obtain a construction permit lest the resultant building endanger the poor creature's habitat.

Few European cities of comparable size have so large a complement of fine recent buildings as Barcelona. The processing of a submission there rarely takes longer than three months and can often be achieved in a fortnight. No 'aesthetic control' is exercised by public officials though all plans and drawings have to be signed by an architect – in the past this gave rise to a breed of armchair architect known, self-explanatorily, as a 'signer'. The breed is said to be on the wane. Peter Hodgkinson who works in Ricardo Bofill's remarkable atelier draws a comparison between the practice of large developers in Spain and that of the builders of Georgian London: the developer sets a style which is granted statutory authority by the relevant municipality – in the eighteenth century covenants were used to the same end. It need hardly be said that Bofill's own developments exhibit an inventiveness and farouche exuberance which would ensure that he was sent packing from any planning office in these islands. What his achievement, and that of many Americans, shows is that inspired architecture and high commerce can be meet bedfellows – something which Britain has lost sight of.

Should this burst of hispanophilia seem too excessive it can be countered by stating unreservedly that planning has in a more general sense failed miserably in that country – witness the sprawl along the Mediterranean coast. By contrast Britain's planners have succeeded marvellously in preserving our countryside and the environs of our towns and cities, that is what they are good at.

1979

Dreary Old Fool: Lord Esher Remembers

Lord Esher's subtitle is balefully disingenuous. It of course seeks to imply that the 'rebuilding' was necessitated by the depredations of the blitz. Now it is true that Hitler did have a part to play in all this but he had all but played it by the time that war was declared. His abhorrence of architectural modernism and, particularly, his closing down of the Bauhaus caused the leading lights of the new dogma to flee Germany and spread the word; further, his abhorrence made modernism respectable in this country, where it soon became equated with the cause of freedom and the struggle against tyranny. Powerful ammunition for young idealists like Lionel Brett (as he then was). No matter that the prize bit of Italian modernism was the Fascist headquarters in Como – just look at what Samuel Hoare, the arch appeaser, was doing. What he was doing was having built a large classical shooting lodge from whose tennis court he would rush to engage in eager telephonic conversation with the pacific Führer. It is not difficult to sympathize with young Brett. It is very difficult to sympathize with old Esher's persistence in associating modernism with the left (the good guys) and classicism, in its many guises, with the right. Actually there was a place for modernism in the Reich: it was deemed suitable for factories, warehouses, bridges and the like.

A Broken Wave comprises three parts. First, a standard (i.e., partial and partisan) couple of introductory chapters notable for their vulgar generalities and for instances of opinion dressed up as fact. Try this: 'That it *was* moribund is historic fact.' What he is referring to is the fashion for building neo-Georgian council flats. I would have been astonished had he admitted to approving them, it is a point of honour among

such men to deplore them – but 'historic fact', well . . . Next come five specific post war case histories: of London, Liverpool, Newcastle, Sheffield, and Milton Keynes. ('Nothing can detract from the triumph that clean air and brave architecture have wrought in Sheffield . . .') Finally there is a chapter whose prose gets ever purpler, whose tone parodies that of those that have preceded it; it is the tone we have come to expect of the architectural old guard of which Esher (sometime president of the RIBA, planner of *inter alia* Portsmouth and Caracas, architect/planner of Hatfield, architectural consultant to Downside, Rector of the Royal College of Art, honorary fellow of too many institutions to name, chairman of the Northern Home Counties branch of the National Trust, etc.) is a leading member. Students of such matters will note that his RIBA presidency was in the mid-1960s which was of course a very wonderful decade for British architecture, that Portsmouth is a tremendous symphony in concrete, that Downside has a swinging modern cinema cum fun-palace, that there is no conflict of interest between chairmanship of a chunk of the National Trust and leadership of an architectural practice that is forever seeking to improve the face of modern Britain.

The tone these people adopt is one of defiance tempered by whining self-pity, by protestations of ignorance, by desperate buck-passing, by a chronic quest for loopholes. This is a type that will not come clean, that cannot countenance the idea of expiation, a type that glibly attributes the 'moral collapse' of modern architecture to a bunch of journalists. One can of course be nothing but thankful for these journalists though it is improbable that they had the influence that Esher grants them. His book is the unconvincing testament of a man who must know *au fond* that he has devoted his lifetime to a worthless cause. The fact that he writes in a style that swings between architects' obfuscation and cliché (grasp the nettle, brave experiment, no-nonsense Yorkshireman, no-nonsense Sheffield artisan) should be no surprise; this is the subliterary analogue of the 'architecture' that Esher and his smug chums have foisted on the rest of us.

One of his complaints is splendidly indicative of the mentality of his sort of architect. He quotes a piece in *The Times* by Michael Church advising that 'planners and architects should be put in the stocks, should be made to live in the concrete hells they have created'. Then he says that this was written at a time when 'British planning and architecture were the most highly regarded in Europe and British architects the most frequent winners of international competitions'. Highly regarded by whom? Quite. By other planners and architects. And who judged the competitions? Yes . . .

A century before Esher, at an architecturally happier moment, Sir William Tite was president of the RIBA. His church at Gerrard's Cross, a stylistic salad that combines the utilitarian aspect of a workhouse or warehouse with Byzantine fancy, is perhaps the most striking – though not the most lovable – in Buckinghamshire, whose best buildings are without exception secular. The only church that might have broken this rule, Soane's at Tyrringham, was never executed. Mr Watkin does not mention it. His only other important omission is that of Lutyens's Nashdom which is referred to in the entry for Burnham as being dealt with under Hitcham. It is not. Otherwise Mr Watkin's guide to the county is, in this respect, unexceptionable.

Of course the Shell Guides do not aspire to the thoroughness of 'The Buildings of England' series, nor do they go in for the quasi-scientific classification of buildings that Pevsner and (more so) his acolytes in that series are fond of. The approach is less formal and there is not much preaching; some distinguished writers have contributed volumes – Betjeman (who started the enterprise), Michael Pitt-Rivers, David Verey (who also did the Gloucestershire B. of E. and in the second edition adopted a heretical anti-Pevsner line). Bruce Watkin, too, is pretty good though some of his entries sound as if they have been chores to do. Not surprising; it is difficult to work up much enthusiasm about places like Milton Keynes, on the subject of which even Esher is guardedly laudatory.

Quite properly the best places get the most photographs – Stowe, Waddesdon, West Wycombe Park (whose massive and primitive mausoleum was, I was interested to learn, done by a

member of the Bastard family of Blandford under the patronage of the grossly profligate Bubb Doddington for whom Vanbrugh did Eastbury near that town). Stowe is obviously the finest place in the county, indeed it is the finest park in the country; the house, as Mr Watkin observes, is merely the grandest ornament in the park. He quite rightly deplores the standard of the buildings that the school has erected since the 1930s. The photographs are printed in high contrast monochrome which suggests that Bucks is forever in the grip of thunderstorms. They are good to look at and the book is a bargain.

Mr Gradidge's contribution to the burgeoning Lutyens industry uses photographs from *Country Life*'s great store. Many are on glass negatives and are a bit flat in reproduction; this is probably due to the quality of the paper that Mr Gradidge's publisher has allowed him. I suspect that the publisher may also be to blame for the inept punctuation – there are redundant commas everywhere. The publisher cannot, however, be blamed for phrases like 'brave experiment' and for the opinion that some of Lutyens's 'emotional turmoil seems to be reflected' in houses such as Berrydown and Sullingstead. Mr Gradidge is an architect, I know, but that is no excuse. Nevertheless this is an assured performance and as good as his *Dream Houses*. The best of Lutyens's houses do indeed have a quality that suggests that they have been conceived in dreams; they have a hallucinatory clarity and make the unobvious appear obvious (which is probably a mark of genius). Marsh Court, which I first saw when I was 12 years old, is still the subject of my dreams and still seems *sublime*. Though – mistakenly, I think – he deprecates the Institute at Hampstead Garden Suburb as 'Neo Georgian at its worst' (not even Pevsner is so harsh) and though he clearly dislikes neo-Georgian houses like The Salutation and Nashdom (which gets a rough deal in the books reviewed here) he does write that 'Lutyens was able to produce in one year more than most architects are able to in a lifetime'. Only a fool or an Esher would not concur with that. Esher forfeits all claims to credibility when he refers to 'Gibberd's elegant Catholic Cathedral rising on the site where Lutyens had fortunately

been denied his last and vastest monument . . .' Anyone who has compared the wretched Gibberd's tawdry wigwam (a 'worship space' if ever there was one) with Lutyens's aborted wonder will know what I mean. Gibberd, as you would expect in a contemporary of Esher, knew nothing about awe and might.

Stephen Bayley's book is as painstakingly and fussily detailed as the monument which is its subject. The death of the Prince Consort provided an opportunity for self-advancement to many people and Mr Bayley is very entertaining about those who jumped on the bandwagon. They included William Dyce (the painter of Pegwell Bay), 'Greek' Thomson, the sculptor John Gibson, Hittorff, and so on. Thomson's proposal for a Greco-Egyptian monument was especially handsome, better than any of those that the Memorial Committee solicited. But it chose Scott and it was Scott we got, though it is unlikely that Albert would have approved – he disliked the gothic (and the Ecclesiologists who promoted it) and was chairman of the governors of the only mid-19th-century public school to be built in a style other than gothic, Wellington College. I doubt if Scott was being quite straightforward when, in his submission, he cited Albert's approval of his gothic chapel at Wellington. He obtained this commission because the school's first headmaster, the muscular Christian E. W. Benson, loathed John Shaw's building and was determined that he should not be allowed to add a chapel in a similar (neo-Wren) style.

The type in Mr Bayley's book is unjustified and the price is ridiculous. Nonetheless I suppose it is worth forgoing one bottle of Vega Sicilia in order to own it.

A Broken Wave: The Rebuilding of Britain 1940–1980 by Lionel Esher
Buckinghamshire: A Shell Guide by Bruce Watkin
Edwin Lutyens: Architect Laureate by Roderick Gradidge
The Albert Memorial: The Monument in its Social and Architectural Context by Stephen Bayley

1982

Assyrian On The Fold: Tom Wolfe's Architectural Ignorance

You have to wonder which came first, title or conceit; could be of course that it was one of those instances of surging afflation when all is synchronous and *together*, just like in the 60s (Wolfe's very own decade). You have to wonder because Wolfe's architectural history is so shaky and *easy* that this book suggests a grossly distended dinner-party turn. The reader, the fellow guest, nods along smugly because he knows that although the ideas might be received ones they are the right ones, the smart ones, and that T. W.'s espousal of them somehow lifts them out of the province of anything so threadbare as *ordinary* received ideas. And besides they have never before been strung together with such speedy wit, with such rich dark smart sophistication.

The genesis of the book is this: in 1979 Wolfe was invited by the RIBA to address its annual conference. This is a drear bash when men in the shiny, static-crackling products of multiple tailoring briefly abandon their attempts to turn Salisbury into a place relevant to the last quarter of the 20th century, to create a Stow-on-the-Wold that reflects today's building technology, to give Sherborne a network of inner ring roads that will make it the pride of Dorset and the envy of Vehicular Infrastructuralists from here to Bogota. They gather in Portland Place, clip bits of plastic on to their breast pockets, rub polyester shoulders (these are the only sparks that fly) and listen to, mostly, talks by men who have built even worse buildings than they have or men who have built nothing but have made up for it by having important theories (more of this phenomenon later). The more solemn the speaker, the more impenetrable the subject, the more copious the jargon, the better the reception. So what the Acrilan army

made of Wolfe was this: the troops couldn't understand him, most of them, and those who could understand him resented what they heard. They couldn't understand him because he spoke neither basic English nor the stunted inelegant argot of advanced architectural thought. Instead he conjured elaborate – you might say fussy – metaphors, piled up alliterative lists, exhibited as great a contempt for functional language as for functional architecture. They were fazed because his attack on all the familiar architectural mores of the past 50 years and upon everything that they had been brought up to believe in was not angry or vicious or tub-thumping but coolly mocking. Architects, he seemed to be saying, are not the villains that Booker and Stamp and Watkin would have us believe them to be; rather they are merely figures of fun, sheepish creeps to take the piss out of. The reply was that to which the architectural profession has kneejerking recourse: that the criticisms of the layman are 'irrelevant' just because they are lay criticisms and because laymen just don't understand because they aren't architects. This business of cyclical exclusivity is one of Wolfe's themes.

The main one is the hefty irony whereby the minimalist, ascetic, aesthetically bereft stuff devised (or at least institutionalized) by pious and puritanical German socialists in the wake of the Great War should have become the typical (though evidently not *representative*) architecture of the most rampantly, triumphantly capitalist society that God ever blessed – mid-century USA. Inexpressive, inapt – yes; but the point had been reached in all areas of vaguely creative activity where it was no longer the patron but the artist who called the shots and that to question 'progress' or admit incomprehension was philistine and bourgeois and to haul out that chestnut about the Emperor's clothes was just plain vulgar. School-of-Caro sculptors and concrete musicians (it's the reinforcing rods through the brain that do the trick) really didn't matter – you paid lipservice and forgot. But architecture gets in the way of us all.

Eighteen months after Wolfe had delivered his lecture an expanded (padded) version of it appeared in American *Harper's* (no relation to *Harper's and Queen*) and now here we

have it all wrapped up by Cape, designed by Mrs Wolfe and with photo captions that are unmistakably by the author. It is an unexceptionable idea that the man is peddling but it's a commonplace one too, one that is now taken for granted by everyone with any interest in architecture (everyone, that is, apart from architects and the architectural correspondents of the *Sunday Times* and the *Observer*).

The book's importance lies with the might of the author's reputation and with the fact that he is a propagandist who may achieve an audience that is not notably keen on the less than hip aesthetes who in this country are in the van of the charge against the Friends of Casson. It is not an ignoble fate for a book to be consigned to the store of *utile* literature, by which standards it is pretty good.

By more demanding standards it is not quite the ticket. Wolfe either does not know Adolf Loos or omits him because he doesn't fit in. (Loos was *the* precursor of the Bauhaus, a head case whose hatred of ornament was the far side of pathologic.) He doesn't have an adequate grasp of the many strains of European and English design that coexisted alongside and even overshadowed the early Modern Movement; indeed, once outside the confines of school-primer American architectural history he is liable to stray wide of the mark – a week in a decent library would have worked wonders. That said there is much here that is splendidly funny and the recurring notion of strength through isms (what he calls the compounds) with their manifestos and quaint rituals is fine. So too is his deprecation of that breed of architect who achieves a reputation with a salad of semiological cant and arty drawings – though I am sure that I am not alone in wishing that more architects would restrict themselves to such comparatively harmless forms of endeavour. Like, say, the academic lit-crit industry, these are ridiculous and risible, but their decadence is of little moment to the outside world. Their importance is merely that they offer a barndoor of a target to an elegantly sarcastic commentator.

From Bauhaus to Our House by Tom Wolfe

1982

Fin Time

When I was little America was the toyshop of the world, a place where (so we heard) everyone had everything, where things were automatic, where the present looked like the future, where boring old wood had been banished in favour of two tone plastic, where there were no Morris Oxfords or Wolsey 1500s but Chevrolets in metallic carmine and creamy buttercup. At the age of ten I could tell a photo of a De Soto from one of a Dodge, an Olds from a Buick – what marvellous toys they were, with their faces built of chrome and lights for eyes, with their portholes and fins, and their names! Hawk, Falcon, Firebird, Thunderbird – some years an entire aviary was on the road, others it was a dangerous aquarium (Marlin, Barracuda). I should have known – but I was only ten, that's why I didn't know. All these toys were for grown-ups, for grown-ups stuck fast in perpetual infantilism, with the childish urge to acquire, *to have*. Put this material phenomenon down, if you will, to the collective compensation visited upon itself by a generation that had grown up in want, in the depression. But that doesn't account for the sheer coarseness of the artefacts that piled upon pile in the homes of middle America. Nor does aesthetic illiteracy alone account for it. What we're looking at here are insular innocence and the capacity for self-ignorance on massive scales. In other words we're looking at an epoch when the constant, immutable characteristics of middle American populism were manifest in design. Now, of course, they're manifest in the White House. The difference being that no one can honestly say of Reagan and his hard-nosed gerontocracy what Nabokov said of the diner/gas station/motel topography of *Lolita*: 'There's

nothing so exhilarating as philistine vulgarity.' Philistine yes. Vulgar yes. Exhilarating no.

One notable failure of what Thomas Hine calls the Populuxe era, 1954–64 (the earlier date seems arbitrary and more than a little late), was a car called the Edsel, named by Ford, like Ferrari's Dino, after, I believe, a dead son – when I was ten I'd have been sure about that, now I'm worried by the shadow of that idea. Mr Hine notes in a caption that 'derision focussed on [the Edsel's] vertical grille', but does not suggest why. I'd say that it was for this reason: a vertical grille in 1958 was bound to recall the grilles of cars before they were 'styled', of cars of the 40s, of the days before conspicuous and competitive consumption. And in 1958 there was no mileage in the past. Today everything tries to look like something that existed before; historical allusion is a norm – as it has habitually been since the Renaissance (neo Greek houses, repro Louis chairs, 'Georgian' phone boxes etc). The past was always the source. It was even the source for the orthodox Moderns – look at Pound, look at Louis Kahn, look at Picasso: it's just that they went back to primitive pasts, to pasts previously unknown or off-limits (pagan or African or vernacular). What American designers of the mainstream 50s achieved was a style, or set of styles, appropriate to a country with no past. They innocently forged a new primitivism that drew on the zoomorphic (fins), the geomorphic (rough rock finishes), on 'organic' shapes (boomerang tables) and on the iconography of the presumed future (streamlining, molecular models). And the irony, as I say, was that in all innocence they aped the essential mannerism – the total division of ornament from function – that typifies the artefact of a society just emerging from the mud, just down from the trees and by a fluke equipped with a belligerent technology capable of reproducing and refining that artefact millionfold. So they had World War II; others had slingshot technology that in the week between the attack by the troglodytes across the valley and the attack by the wolves on the slopes might be employed making, say, drinking vessels which, not being objects of functional belligerence, would be decorated with crude representations of what was around – the fins of the fish in the river, the fossil prints in

the rocks, the streamlined arrowheads (arrows are the weapons of tomorrow: if everyone has them no one will use them).

The author, one of those jolly, bearded, buttoned-down Americans who would love to be too European to be true, never quite gets to the quiddity of his subject but he isn't bad and is a lot less rash than Tom Wolfe was in *Bauhaus to Our House*. He makes the occasional crass analogy – there's a lot of guff about potato crisps' correspondence to corrugated roofs, but is mostly sound. The trouble is that he *is* American, albeit East Coast, and can't quite get far enough away (spatially, temporally) from the bizarre cultural parenthesis that was his childhood and which I'm now thankful wasn't mine.

Populuxe by Thomas Hine

1987

Less Is Less

The reaction of the English to tall buildings is odd and inconsistent. Call them skyscrapers and put them in New York (or Chicago or Cleveland or Sioux Falls) and they incur something that approaches, if not awe, then admiration. Call them tower blocks and put them in Glasgow (or Hackney or Hanley or Colchester – our old friend the University of Essex) and everyone jumps up and down in a pogo of deep concern and true ire and calls for the blood of a now aged, eternally talentless architect. 'Aesthetic and social disaster' is the bit that comes next. But Paul Goldberger's informal history of the most quintessentially American of building types prompts me, not for the first time, to wonder if the 'social' is merely dressing and if what we (I mean those English who do not live in high rise public housing but abhor it none the less) really object to is the places' appearance and the way they spoil previously consistent towns and suburbs. It is not difficult to find those who are otherwise orthodox in their Augustinian conviction of our inevitable weakness jabbering on about the ghastly effects of tower blocks, about the way that a hostile *environment* (also a word they'd usually steer clear of) creates muggers and problem families and all that. Very likely they are indulging in that peculiarly English puritanism which does not allow that an aesthetic judgement be made untempered by some sort of moral or *utile* alloy; it is very handy when deprecating something that you dislike the *look* of to be able to haul in the intelligence that seven of its tenants have taken their own lives, that valium is delivered in catering packs to accommodate the great demand, that the children have a haunted look etc. No matter that many other forms of public housing have a similar record of own goals (as we in the Met.

call them) and pill popping and haggard kiddies, these other forms do not offend our eyes and sensibilities in the way that tower blocks do.

Likewise we invent extra-aesthetic sources of complaint about tall commercial and institutional buildings – awful places to work in, monuments to greed, monuments to aldermanic pomposity and so on. More red herrings as, I am sure, a fondness for New York indicates. Britain's skyscrapers are hated not because they are skyscrapers but because they are such bad skyscrapers; there are few exceptions. They are bad for a number of reasons, chief among which is that they derive from a tradition that, although it had some adherents in America, is essentially European and utopian rather than theatrical and practical. The precursors of the New York skyscraper were, according to Rem Koolhass in his exciting though numbingly pretentious *Delirious New York* (a book in whose direction the mostly straightforward Goldberger nods), the funfair towers of Coney Island – hence their showiness, hence their begetters' competitiveness in the matter of height: the architect of the Chrysler Building was so determined that it should exceed his former partner's effort at 40 Wall Street that he added the curious spire, which is of course what makes it so distinctive. Both buildings were soon to be eclipsed by the Empire State Building.

It was not until after World War II that American skyscrapers began to manifest the influence of those European architectural gurus who had fled Hitler, found themselves unwelcomed (or at least uncommissioned) in Britain and had crossed the Atlantic just in time. The most individually powerful of them was Mies van der Rohe, whose own work was done mostly in Chicago, where he found a climate sympathetic to his austere minimalism and disciples who unquestioningly accepted the rightness of his neat daft maxim 'Less is More'. These disciples included the partners in the firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill who, so slavishly did they ape their master, came to be known as 'the three blind Mies'. One of the more ludicrous sections of *The Skyscraper* is that in which Goldberger purports to discern differing qualities in Miesian towers. Of course they all look the same – boring glass boxes

just like that which Mr Peter Palumbo is presently attempting to foist on the City (and which a number of true believers like old Casson and Stephen Gardiner were busily promoting); London is already lumbered with too many such drearily unimaginative piles and can surely do without another. Why it is lumbered with them is because, like New York in the early postwar years, it fell to modernist rhetoric. During these years skyscraper design was at its nadir: the 'theoretically based', undecorated pile in the sky showed itself in this country at its very worst. At least in New York and Chicago there were tall buildings to hide the bald monsters, here there was nothing. And as the 'rebuilding' of Britain went on over the next two decades the boneheadedness of Miesian design became clear to everyone: Less is Less. The boneheadedness of Corbusian design also became clear here, though it never really caught on in the USA. Now this country is no longer a willing host to tall buildings and American architects have mostly returned to an older tradition, that of *image making*.

Lack of decoration and visual relief apart, the greatest difference between the treatment of skyscrapers here and over there is to be found on the ground. As Goldberger points out in the introduction to *The City Observed*, New York is a rigorously planned city and one in which the majority of buildings, high or low, modernist or stagey, adhere to the street wall; there are plazas and so on but they are not the norm that they became in this country where the very idea of the street disappeared beneath the weight of Corbusian dogma. Had skyscrapers been taken up in Britain at a different moment – in the 1930s, say, when the models would inevitably have been American, and had the urge to build alternatives to the traditional and *comprehensible* street been less marked, then we might, I suppose, still be slinging them up. It is worth noting that most of the buildings that Goldberger refers to are commercial or official, and when he does refer to domestic high rise he does not feel impelled to kick off on the social disaster note; this, sure enough, is because the two do not go hand in hand in, say, Manhattan any more than they do in St John's Wood – for some reason or other tall blocks of flats are successful when occupied by the well-to-do (the

richish, anyway). Lifts are not turned into pissoirs, men who can afford more spray cans than you or I will own in a lifetime resist the temptation to write on walls, access from the street is restricted.

The City Observed is a guide book of a sort of which there is no up-to-date equivalent to London – the nearest thing is *Nairn's London* (1966 and regrettably long out of print), though that book covers a far wider area and is far more winningly wayward. Goldberger is more interesting for the mass of information that he imparts than for the often jejune opinions that he proffers. Just as English critics tend to divide current architects into the good guys and the bad ('the herbivores and the carnivores' as Casson puts it, borrowing from Michael Frayn) so does Goldberger; this division is made largely according to the aims and pretensions of architects rather than according to their actual buildings. Thus for archvillain Richard Seifert (who is probably a victim of anti-Semitism) read archvillain Edward Durrell Stone. Neither of these men has ever made the right arty noises. They tend to get their buildings put up and to design for their clients rather than for their peers. Goldberger incudes a lot that is banal and that is rendered even more banal by tiny snap-shots (the photographic illustration of *The Skyscraper* is good). He also includes a number of buildings that are rather delightful – a lot of good late 19th- and early 20th-century classicism, a strangely inaccurate couple of Adam pastiches from the 1930s (one of them a hospital for alcoholics), some good streamlined stuff, a surprising number of fine churches. None of these though is likely to provoke the wonder that the great sky-scrapers of half a century ago are capable of provoking, which is still the same sort of wonder as Scott Fitzgerald's Dutch sailors felt when their eyes first gazed on the unknown world.

The Skyscraper by Paul Goldberger
The City Observed: New York: A Guide to the Architecture of Manhattan by Paul Goldberger

1983

Jay Lays Egg: Breakfast TV's HQ

Eggs. Bloody great four-foot-high jumbo jobs stuffed into the world's biggest eggcups and sitting on top of a former garage beside the canal in deepest alternative Camden Town. It would have taken a chicken the size of an elephant to lay such things. But anything a really big chicken can do, Messrs David Frost, Peter Jay and Terry Farrell could of course do too. Terry who? We all know Frost: the man who told us that 'life is a theme of opportunity' (maybe he meant opportunism) and who, in Christopher Booker's memorable words, 'wanted to become world famous for being David Frost'. We know Jay too. The Cleverest Young Man in Britain and all that. Ambassador, pundit, poker player, overachiever. But this Terry, this Tel, who is he? He is an architect and, according to Mr Jay, 'a genius', though this is the sort of thing that a patron is almost bound to say, for it points to his (the patron's) percipience, taste etc. His genius has shown itself here in the said eggs. Breakfast – eggs – get?

The entire building is at about this level: it is joky, knowingly vulgar, designed to *épater* architectural puritans. The trouble of course with architectural jokes is that they are perpetually *there* – they don't go away once they've been told. The tired comic is, so to speak, stuck on stage infinitely repeating the same gag. Obviously an ostentatious sort of design was just the thing for a project involving Frost, Jay and the execrable 'Mike' Parkinson. But you have to wonder whether the place doesn't match its denizens just a little too well. After all, the theatricality that Farrell has achieved has nothing to do with the theatricality of Bernini or Vanbrugh – the baroque for all its extravagance is concerned with many effects adding up to one great effect, the unities adhered to in

stone. What Farrell has done, in lots of exciting man-made materials, is strictly music-hall. The place seems as substantial as Christmas decorations. The feeling is one of ephemerality. Can it be that the building is going to prove a metaphor for the fate of the occupying company? Unlikely – it is improbable that breakfast TV will be a flash in the pan. It may actually outlast its home.

Now, the building itself (which quite a few architectural pundits are already busily proclaiming as a 'key' building of this young decade). Terry Farrell's best-known work, I guess, is Clifton Nurseries' premises in the Piazza at Covent Garden. It is a joke on a modest scale – half a greenhouse with a whole pediment and lots of columns, some of which owe more to early Fifties hatstands than to the classical orders. The thing about these post-modernist exercises is that they are the architectural equivalent of pop art in painting (it is typical that architecture should be a decade and a half 'behind' painting) – they flatter those who look at them (and commission them), the point being that there is obviously a joke about architectural history being made and if you appreciate that you're entitled to feel the warm glow of smugness all over. There is a further joke which is that the initial joke is so broad that only the ESN will fail to get it – so Farrell's stuff flatters just about everyone. In TV-am he has found an ideal client, indeed the coupling of architect and client appears here to have been a rare and beautiful thing. Farrell has been given free rein to do his will – so there are all sorts of clashing colours, bits of neo-art deco and hi-tech and Festival of Britain stuff; there is grey stained wood and corrugated metal and primary-bright plastic; there is what architects call an atrium – i.e. a glassed arcade with something that looks like a cottage (in the Orton/Driberg sense) built from giant kiddy-bricks. This pissoiresque curiosity is the hospitality-room.

Farrell allegedly got the job because of his sheer dynamism, efficiency etc. It would be impertinent to question this, but one cannot but surmise that there may be a further reason why Farrell should have appealed to the Cleverest Young Man and to Frost as well. Just as, say, a speech impediment is *de rigueur* among London Weekend TV's performers (Belbyd

Bragg, Bhwian Wawden, Janih Stree-Paw-ugh), so would it seem that an appearance which apes artifice is the *sine qua non* of success at breakfast telly. Look: Frost has a head of natural hair that passes for a fine-woven nylon toupee, Jay has a pair of lips that looks as if they were bought in a joke shop and hastily stuck on to his face. It is not surprising that such a pair should go for Farrell, who has eyebrows that are straight out of an old ham's make-up case. D. Healey must be envious. Each one is an abundant moustache plastered on to the poor man's glabella. The occasion on which Frost and Jay first encountered Farrell must have been remarkable, like one of those jungle encounters when the wandering tribesman recognizes his own kin by the disposition of the ornamental bones through his nose. It is a scene that TV-am's in-house writers might profitably work up into a drama of wonder and magic, though it is to be hoped that they will not take verisimilitude so far as to make the actor representing Frost (Robin Askwith) wear that quintessential telly-man's chauffeur-hire outfit.

1983

Gimmicks To Sit On

The idea of course is unexceptionable enough, though hardly novel. You know: give your product, Polaroid Swinger Adult Pornopack 500, to Bailey, Donovan, Arrowsmith etc. and publish the results. The result, *endorsement*. Give the Adler Adult Literacy Helpmate to Jeffrey Archer and he can produce a syntactically OK sentence *in only eight drafts*. Publish it. Endorsement. Give ColorCore to Robert Venturi, SITE, Eva Jiricna, the unhappily named Peter Crutch, John Makepeace etc., then exhibit what they did with it. Endorsement, sort of. There are two problems here. One, furniture making is not a commonplace pastime like photography and it is a rather, shall we say, more specialised endeavour than mere word processing (why those whose lot it is to buy flotillas of type machines for office use should be influenced by Messrs Archer, Forsyth, Deighton and so on is a mystery; but I guess they must be, otherwise such campaigns would not run and run the way they do). Two, if you are in the business of producing furniture you may not be entirely convinced to go with ColorCore by a gamut of artefacts which demonstrate that its main appeal is to that part of the brain which trades in the resolutely 'different', the determinedly odd, the strivingly cute. What ColorCore does is to induce effortfulness. Maybe any product foisted on designers in such a void would have these results. By *void* I mean to suggest that generously contrived situation where the craftsman (woman or child – to judge from some of the stuff) is not required to answer to the market place, or to the whims of a patron or even to his (her, its) own gut sensibility – gut sensibility leads us all to work with what is familiar to us, or with what we think we can make our own (what we believe we can excel with). Schemes

like the ColorCore wheeze seem to stipulate freedom of choice within an alien medium. It is not a recipe for inspiration.

Now, the next exhibition at the Boilerhouse is one entitled 'National Characteristics' – which will attempt to show how the qualities that we (lazily) ascribe to different peoples are manifest in their design. I have no clue as to where the germ of this interesting if potentially fraught idea came from, but if it originated in the disparity of the American, French and British exhibits in this show I wouldn't be a bit surprised. This is a tripartite show, really. (I suspect that the very obvious national differences may be due to different briefs – but that's just a suspicion, that's all.)

British. There's an illusion of *usefulness* about this lot, which may be a way of saying that they're victims of that most common of qualities, common sense. There's also a cloacal, Turd World (as we say in Ireland, I'm half Irish) quality on show, viz Eva Jiricna's chair which is neo-Elsan, and Peter Glynn Smith's removable table top which recalls dustbin lids and riot shields. Peter Crutch's appalling 'Storage Tower' looks like a refugee from a grittily naturalistic stage set (Geoff Rose at the Bush Theatre, say) for a play about gay diseases in a gay locker room. If I were Mr Crutch I'd change not only my name but my manufacturer – look, Crutch, Hostess Furniture can't even make the drawers flush. And if I was called Hostess Furniture I'd change my name lest I got importunate calls from *Penthouse* readers. Still, it's your choice, Crutch. Laurel to Ms Jiricna.

American. Neo-hedonism goes go-go. I mean *wild*. There's a door by SITE which shows what happens to a door when Clint has put a Magnum round through it or when Harvey Keitel has punched it or when Mickey Rourke has just looked at it – it looks nasty. There's also an awful lot of stuff for remakes of *films noirs*, i.e. the props for knowing, self conscious re-treads with Gere muscling up as Mitchum – tables like jukes in Grand Rapids, cocktail cabinets (Borax going on Dali) which Jack Carson might have mixed a stiff Double Bayley from. The winner here is Venturi, for the simple reason that he has not provided a twenty thousand word text to accompany, justify and explain his spectacularly bathetic mirror 'In The Greek Revival Manner'.

French. They come on like the guy in the Cointreau ads – small-town Delon: nifty, charming, clever, knowing. It would be overdoing it to ascribe to them the authoritarianism that Delon now boasts but they do like small men in high boots: their inspiration is Napoleonic, and they aren't illiterate. They make it clear that the classical tradition was not lost in French schools of art and architecture in the 50s and 60s. And this, retrospectively, is probably the greatest of all national differences.

POST MODERN COLOUR Boilerhouse

1986

Pevsner's Reputation

We incessantly re-map the past, re-invent it in our own image – just as it is an old truism that sci-fi, dystopian fiction, tends to reflect the age when it is written rather than the one it's written about (1984 for 1948) so is our retrospection coloured by the present or our wishfulness about the present. Our past then is not the past of our fathers' generation: their past – we can smugly swear to it – was partial, faultily mapped, myopically charted. Damn the cartographers. And if this dodgy surveying boomerangs so that the bad past comes back to contaminate the present let us consign those cartographers to hell.

We all know now that architectural modernism didn't work. There is easy money in this barndoor of a received idea. Even if your grasp of architectural history is as butter-fingered as Tom Wolfe's you can spin a buck or a million telling the world where it all went wrong – the rollcall of public criminals is dismally familiar: Gropius, Mies, Corb and, parochially, Wells Coates, Casson, Esher, Lasdun. They at least all built, all defaced the earth or enhanced it (according to taste). Poor Pevsner built nothing, sedulously devoted himself to the precise classification of England's stock of buildings, produced what is perhaps the greatest work of popular scholarship to appear in these islands in this century and still he is reviled. The charge, first brought by David Watkin in *Morality and Architecture* (1977, Pevsner died in 1983), was that Pevsner's proselytizing on behalf of the Modern Movement, which he saw as the future, caused him to misrepresent the past – like some sort of determinist conjuror he attempted to forge a seamless continuum of stylistic reduction which rendered modernism *inevitable*. More than inevitable, morally correct –

in this, of course, Pevsner was nothing if not Victorian. His equation of technological and architectonic progress with moral progress leaps straight out of the nineteenth century, it might have been made by a hygiene reformer, a patron of institutes for working men, any garden-citizen. But Pevsner was not alone among his contemporaries in thinking thus – far from it, he was altogether typical; so why is it that he has copped the abuse when such figures as Anthony Bertram and J. M. Richards escaped it – they after all shared Pevsner's abhorrence of what he called historicism (what he meant was copyism), they shared his conviction that the only important architecture of the nineteenth century was engineer's architecture, they too went in for the low sophistry which allowed them to dismiss anything without a flat roof and concrete walls as *not being of this century*.

Pevsner got it in the neck because of his very versatility, because he declined to compartmentalize his kindred selves, because of his (dangerous) popularity. Pevsner the historian was pervious to Pevsner the pamphleteer, Pevsner the inventorist of (some of) England's buildings was blinkered by Pevsner the advocate. He gave us what boils down to a personal anthology of *taste* dressed as fact; and because his became the standard works he misled two generations, two generations of architects most notably. He opened this nation's eyes to its architecture while championing the worst architecture it ever got and denying the worth of all that was most characteristic of its recent past. The typical stuff of the fifty years up to the outbreak of the Second World War – Edwardian baroque, neo-Georgian, joke oak and so on – is ignored in his histories and deprecated in his guides. The facts that it worked, that it was liked, were neither here nor there. The impression Pevsner gives of those years, when not actually rueing England's 'backwardness' in comparison with progressive continental Europe, is that nothing worthwhile was built save by Arts and Crafts hairshirts or by Hampstead modernist aertexes – he was ashamed of what his adoptive countrymen had mostly been up to and obviated his shame like an ostrich. The catholic scope of early twentieth century English architecture is much better represented by Osbert Lancaster and John Betjeman.

And here's the rub. Pevsner was never able to dissemble his academic professionalism, there was something of the zealot about him, something of the earnest bookworm and a foreign one at that. Lancaster and Betjeman were adept at playing the amateur – their enthusiasms were regarded as slightly dotty, they had more to do with lubrication than lucubration. Pevsner's high seriousness was anathema to terminally English aesthetes, it was alien without being exotic; and it was so rigorous that it was as much a cul-de-sac as an example – witness the Pevsnerian cartoons that his disciples made of themselves when they came to collaborate on the later volumes of the Buildings of England. They are more like Pevsner than Pevsner. They have his mannerisms but not his eye. Nor do they temper their solemnity with the humour and felicities that inform his prose; when he chose to he wrote more elegantly than most native English speakers.

Now that modernism is ancient, the exclusive province of oldsters – Foster and Rogers are its middle aged derrière garde – now that an architectural heterogeneity akin to that which existed between about 1840 and 1940 exists once more Pevsner's dogmatic historical practices look as dated as the discredited school of architecture whose PR he was. But the Buildings of England – for all its omissive flaws and blind spots – remains as his monument, sure, but as something more: an obsessively protracted gift from a refugee to the country that took him in, the catalogue of a great free museum, a work whose ultimate greatness is not in its utility but in its encompassing the entire (well, pretty well entire) architectural culture of a nation.

1985

The Master Topographer: Ian Nairn

They weren't all bad, the buildings of the third quarter of this century; the recent listing of stuff of that period, determined (apparently) by reputation rather than tectonic felicity, is of course unlikely to change any minds on this score – but, really, it wasn't all bad. If we can doff those near-obligatory preconceptions, those uniformly worn ideas and look at the buildings of that epoch, especially those which adhere to the building line and are not surrounded by creative, litter strewn 'space', look at them with fresh eyes then, well, maybe, but then again maybe not . . . Fresh eyes were what Ian Nairn possessed. Nairn never designed a building, yet he was more important to the architectural culture of this country during his brief, luminous career, than was any architect of that period. Indeed the architectural culture of that period, despite these allegedly good buildings, belongs more to writers than it does to architects. Pevsner, Betjeman, Nairn seem likely to survive in a way that, say, Spence, Elsom, Luder won't – books do tend to have longer lives than buildings.

Pevsner and Betjeman became national institutions. Ian Nairn, who died four and a half years ago at the age of fifty-three, didn't. Unlike Pevsner, with whom he collaborated for a while, he did not attempt to turn the description of buildings into a form of rigorous system, and of course he left behind a far smaller body of work. Unlike Betjeman Nairn did not suffer from little Englishness, was far less interested in the associational qualities of buildings. But that, as they say, is enough of what Nairn was not like.

He was reticent, a loner, a man who enjoyed the sodality of pubs (as they used to be), and whose prose is coloured by taproom demotic. By which I do not intend to suggest that

this peerless architectural critic was some sort of precursor of Chas 'n' Dave, merely that his melancholy passion is aptly expressed in the sort of language that belongs to informed and informal discussion rather than in the dreadful patois of architectspeak. Buildings moved him, he understood their essence, he recognized that the important school of architecture is the school of talent and that that is of infinitely greater moment than style. He himself was a school of one; this is clear in the TV films he made with titles such as 'Football Towns' – who else would bother not only to look at Wolverhampton and Walsall but to find there much that was commendable. He travelled, on film as in life, in an open Morris Minor, always wore a drab suit and tie, and spoke with a falling cadence which suggested the infinite sadness he felt at the way Britain had been betrayed by its architects and developers. If it was on film that his oddballness was most manifest it was in print that his greatness was evident and, most specifically, in his masterpiece, *Nairn's London*. Can a guidebook seriously be considered a masterpiece? If written with this fervour and strangely tempered love of the subject the answer is yes. The book, initially published in 1966, records the rapidly changing city that he had by that time lived in for a decade. It possesses a strong sense of its author's need to buttonhole you and share his discoveries; it sweats keenness. It is undoubtedly utile, the way Pevsner is. But it is much more too. The guide is greater than many of the objects to which it draws our attention, the signifier is more interesting than the signified. Nairn's prose has such evocative potency that the actuality frequently can't match it. There is a seamless congruence between what his eye sees and what his hand writes – but it is not the literal that the eye has seen, hence the occasional disappointments if you treat the book as a mere vade mecum. It should be treated as book rather than guidebook. It should be treated as a novel without characters, a novel whose protagonist is the heterogeneous city and whose deuteragonist is the man who stares at the inanimate with such intensity that he is able to grant it a life which is his life. Nairn was a self-effacing writer who revealed himself through buildings which were not merely his subject and his

passion but the things which defined him. London is peculiarly resistant to conventional fictional representation – it is too big, too varied, too much of a patchwork. All that is representable is parts, those parts which we learn through our personal topographies.

Ian Nairn's personal topographies were evidently his professional ones too. You get from *Nairn's London* the feeling of communicable joy at being *employed and paid* to indulge passionate curiosity. You get it too from *Nairn's Paris* which appeared a couple of years later and which by no means confines itself to the titular city. But that book, for all its oddities, lacks the gutsy petit-point of his London or indeed his Surrey, which county he wrote for Pevsner's Buildings Of England series. Nairn was later to abandon the Sussex volume of that series but he and Surrey (his native county) were made for each other. Mere architectural description could not suffice for that land of joke-oak and real rhododendron; what it demands is an acute sense of place and the gift to render that sense. Nairn possessed both, and in his London book he showed a third gift, that of the realization of the emotional potential of townscape. This trinity of gifts made him a great poet of the metropolis.

Nairn's London by Ian Nairn, revised by Peter Gasson

1988

Who's The Highest Tech Of All?

This decade has, so far, been good for architecture, bad for architects. There is no paradox here: the interests of architecture and those of architects do not coincide; indeed, one reason that architecture has thrived is *because* architects haven't. By architecture I mean the entire culture of our built surroundings. Thus this decade has seen the tectonic accumulation that we have learned to call 'the heritage' less threatening than at any time since the War. It has seen the growth of newspaper and magazine coverage of architectural topics to the point where such things have become fashionable; the success of such different but uniformly populist publications as *Interiors* and *Blueprint* is a measure of how far things have gone. And serious architectural-historical publishing has boomed. And galleries, lurching along in the wake of informed taste, have realized that architectural exhibitions can put feet on floors – which has prompted a sort of design that is to be *hung* not built. 'Community' and 'consultation' have become commonplace catchwords. The public has at last begun to get a grip on the most public art. Most importantly, the 'consensus architecture' (the consensus was of architects alone) that was triumphant throughout the third quarter of this century has been challenged, though it is by no means dead – do not be misled by the prints and the telly, they show what is novel, exceptional, smart: they do not show the work of the battalions of mediocre, ageing modernists who still design as though the 60s property boom was at its height.

Thankfully they lack the opportunities they enjoyed then. Things have been bad for them. Money has been tight. Mistrust of architects has been such that no one builds when

he can possibly refurbish an extant building, however indifferent it may be – the devil you know is infinitely preferable to the bright new building failure you don't. The result of this is that the architectural legacy of the 80s will be smaller than that of any decade of this century save the 40s; it is hard to believe that such a combination of circumstances will continue into the 90s. The collective mistrust is founded in our unhappy experiences of several generations of architects, the last of which will (bad luck and ill health willing) have ceased by then to practise; those who come after, as is manifest in the work they have already done, are 'accessible', 'popular'. They do not speak in the obfuscating grunts of an exclusively architectural patois; the new generation's language is a demotic pidgin, and its belief in the primacy of technology is mitigated by a) its taking it for granted, its sheer lack of *wonder* at it, and b) its embarrassed knowledge of its many pratfalls.

The generation gap I refer to – and the watershed is the post war 'bulge' – is not between modern and post modern but between tech and post tech. James Stirling (b.1926), Richard Rogers (b.1933), Norman Foster (b.1935) were children in a world where a family motor car was not the norm, where domestic appliances were manual – this was the dark age of white goods. The 19th century education of technological and moral progress had yet to get the red card. Feats of hydraulic and aeronautic engineering were lauded in newsreels. The world was marching forward. It was enough to make any little boy begin a life-long affair with his Meccano. And what the work of Rogers and Foster celebrates – and what Stirling's work has intermittently celebrated – is their first passionate enchantment with the capabilities of the successive technologies they witnessed during pre-pubescence and, more pertinently, with the *iconography* of those technologies. The poetry of the pylon, the romance of the china conductor, the awed submission to the machine were persistent themes in the 30s, but they were no more than themes. Streamlining did not render a building functional – after all the building wasn't going anywhere; but it looked good, it looked 'modern' (it still does). The building with which Norman Foster, a Mancunian, made his name – the Willis, Faber, Dumas offices in Ipswich –

recalls Owen Williams's Manchester offices of the *Daily Express* of 40 years earlier. It more than recalls it: it apes its sinuous curves, uses the same black glass. It is a work of revivalism. But of course revivalism of modern movement work doesn't count as revivalism. Here's Stephen Gardiner of the *Observer* witlessly deploying the double standard that is an article of faith among proselytizers for the dead cause of modernism. He's writing about a newish house in Kentish Town: 'For once, there is no pastiche – no neo-Georgian, no Post-Modernist jokes, no revivalism.' However three sentences previously Mr Gardiner has enthused: 'You might for a second have stumbled into the 1920s of Le Corbusier and Lubetkin, in Paris.' And he concludes his following sentence: '. . . all of which make impressionistic references to that sparkling style of architecture that launched the modern movement 60 years ago.' As I say, the poor booby, who, in an unselfconscious oxymoron, describes this house as 'a vintage piece of modern architecture', is not alone. I am sure that Norman Foster does not consider that his keeping alight the flame of a half-century-old style (the pretence that modernism was anything more than a style is a pompous lie) makes him a revivalist; technologically he isn't, architectonically he is. His buildings, like those of Rogers, are *not*, though, technologically determined.

They are aesthetically determined; they are in the mainstream tradition of hardline modernism in that they use 'functional' components in a decorative and ornamental way. The air conditioning plant is on the roof, the services are on the outside, there are ducts here and 'services' there not because they have to be but because Messrs Rogers and Foster want them to be. Their grease monkey vocabulary is no more or less 'honest' than the classical vocabulary, it is just less supple, and it is (so far) incapable of transmitting or provoking emotion. The associational baggage of their vocabulary (ships, docks, refineries) militates against anything grander than nostalgia for 'exploded' drawings in the *Eagle*. They make buildings that make boys of us all. They invite us to share in their eternal infantilism. Their buildings are the sculptural analogues of Charles Sheeler's 'precisionist' paintings which

made art (i.e. sense and order) of factoryscapes and marshalling yards. The Royal Academy's first major architectural exhibition in 40 years takes up where the last one left off.

At least it does in the case of Rogers and Foster. James Stirling is a less comforting presence to those ancient modernists, knighted for their part in the destruction of Britain in the 50s and 60s, whose influence at the Royal Academy is such that they have thwarted its attempts to mount an exhibition which actually merits the title 'New Architecture', an exhibition which would reflect the disparate strands of current design, of which orthodox modernism is only one. Stirling is an apostate to modernism. His modernist credentials were impeccable for two reasons: first, his buildings paid overt homage to Le Corbusier and the Russian constructivists; second, they tended not to work properly – they got too hot, they leaked, tiles fell off, windows fell out etc. However by the time that his History Faculty building at Cambridge had got into such a state that the University considered demolishing it Stirling was flying different colours. During the 70s, a decade that was not kind to him, Stirling, under the influence of Leon Krier, evolved a new style, as allusively rich as his early one, but drawing on sources that were strictly off-limits to the orthodox. You might say that Stirling abandoned the sinking ship of modernism with opportunistic prescience. Or you might draw a correspondence with any one of the many artists who have done jolting about-turns – De Chirico, say, who abandoned surrealism for a facetious academicism or Stirling's contemporary Robbe-Grillet whose recent autobiography *Le Miroir Qui Revient* is bereft of the method and manner that characterize his novels. Stirling's new classicism is actually as potent and disturbing as the frozen cityscapes that De Chirico composed from his memories of the Piazza Vittorio Veneto in Turin; but Stirling goes further than Italian architects of the 30s like Guerrini and Rossi whose literal renditions of De Chirico became the closest thing there was to an 'official' Mussolini style. Stirling, in his Stuttgart Staatsgalerie, wittingly evokes the monumentality of Hitler's architects, Speer and Troost – this is either an act of architectural black comedy or an invitation to Germany (and the world, for the whole world

trips to Stuttgart to see this building) to appreciate that it was Nazism that was evil, not muscular classicism, and that guilt by association is no guilt; the latter is more likely, for this complex and heterogeneous building also nods to (again) constructivism and Aalto – parts of the past that are in no need of 'rehabilitation'. What Stirling is doing is to put classicism on an equal footing with the other isms. His earlier work – which would, had the label been coined in the 60s, have been called high tech – was always sculpturally dramatic, possessed of a picturesque grandiosity (no doubt it was the sacrifice of function to form that rendered the places so difficult to use). His new work is – and there is no other word – *mighty*; it has a gravity that touches nerves. The central, open air drum at Stuttgart has coarse grass and heather growing from the top of its circular wall: the effect is ruinous, and it combines with the massive neo-classicism of squat columns and a blank pediment, and with sculptural fragments, to achieve the illusion of something funerary from a half remembered dream. Stirling's art speaks if not to the heart then to the small of the back.

He is quite the most interesting of the architects on show in the next month or so, and he is also the only one who is notably influential. This is odd. Most architects are sheep, or apes. They zealously copy the top dogs of the day: hence the many hundreds of thousands of houses by Wren, the countless stucco villas by Nash; Lutyens designed eighty houses and three hundred of them are in Surrey. This is all good news for estate agents and it demonstrates just how powerful the copyist instinct – which is dignified by such appellations as the *zeitgeist* or the consensus – really is. However, during those periods when there is no prevailing orthodoxy – much, for instant, of the latter half of the 19th century in England, though not in Scotland – an architect can ascend to the heights of the heap, look down, and find no one following him. This must be galling; an army of acolytes is a seal of success. But Rogers and Foster lead nowhere save further up the gadget strewn cul de sac of their own devising. It was not for nothing that Philip Johnson called Foster 'the last modern architect'; he and Rogers are the exhibitionistic heirs of a

moribund tradition and all those pipes are the prostheses and drips of a life support system. Beside them Stirling occupies the middle ground, he is a major source of the new mainstream which is but a trickle after the mainstream of the recent past. But he's going somewhere, his judicious looting of the pre-modern, pre-tech past points a way for the sheep and apes plodding in his sizeable wake.

Quinlan Terry's looting of that same past is injudicious. He too is in a cul de sac, one of literal minded renditions of (mainly) Georgian idioms. He has not revived the classical tradition through re-interpretation, by making it his own; rather he has exhumed a corpse. The result is one of harmless fakery and witting anachronism; it's akin to novels written in the style of, say, the 18th century, camp exercises in style. Terry regards his work as more than this, making fatuous claims for the classical orders having been derived from the Tabernacle in the wilderness that Moses describes in Exodus. Forget this: his work is fun in the way that model villages are fun. His work is stiff, over-correct and over-reverential. Neo-Georgian is a style like any other: in the hands of the illiterate who designed the Prime Minister's sunset home in Dulwich it can be very tacky indeed; in the hands of W. A. Ross, the War Office architect of the 30s whose design for Officers' Messes was repeated up and down Britain, it is dull and stiff; but in the free hands of Oliver Hill and Guy Dawber it produced buildings of real beauty. Terry is closest to Ross, though his work is of course more meticulously detailed and his draughtsmanship is exemplary. His present vogue is occasioned by a collective yearning for a prelapsarian world uncontaminated by rampant technology, a *simple* world in which everyone knows his place. And if such a world is unavailable then symbols of it, its ersatz icons, will have to do instead. This is another pole of escapist illusionism: with Rogers and Foster you are whizzing into a clichéd future, with Terry you're staggering into a cardboard past peopled by yokels and yeomen munching Hovis and quaffing Real Ale.

Terry has been lucky in securing himself a biographer, Clive Aslet, who tempers his idolatry with swooning reverence and awestruck fawning. It's altogether a remarkable performance

from which it's easy to deduce that Terry's career has been a singleminded revolt against his stereotypical Hampstead progressive parents and the experience of spending part of his childhood in an 'advanced' house (a bungalow actually) designed by the totalitarian modernist Bernard Lubetkin. It's also easy to deduce a streak of pretentious snobbishness: Terry tells one prospective client that his current house 'is not a gentleman's house'; and we learn that when altering a house for the Hon. David McAlpine 'he felt the house was unquestionably Doric in character, but he gave it a Corinthian doorcase because he sensed Mr McAlpine to be a strongly Corinthian person.' Wanton flattery of clients is obviously an important part of architectural practice but this, surely, is above and beyond. Even Sir Hugh Casson, the very archetype of the herbivorous, 'caring' architect would not have gone so far. The informal retrospective at the Heinz Gallery – a 'vanity' exhibition in that he has met the costs himself – shows him as a talented dabbler, a Beaton without organza kerchiefs, a man about The Arts (which have little to do with art). Book illustration, illumined notebooks, stage designs, furniture, the Festival of Britain – he's done it all, he had a fecund career. And the architectural part of it demonstrates by default just how much better things are today.

New Architecture: Roger Foster Stirling in the Royal Academy catalogue by Deyan Sudjic
Quinlan Terry at the Anthony Mold Gallery biography by Clive Aslet
Hugh Casson at the RIBA Heinz Gallery

1986

Bofill of Barcelona

Modern architecture and health foods are akin; no, no, not because both are associable (or were, 50 years ago) with cranks and sandals and utopian delusion. Rather because both adjectives require quotes; 'health' is here posing as an adjective and has all too little to do with 'healthy' – witness the hoards of washed-out leguminovores who stalk the streets of this city forever seeking lavs, their bowels rent by overindulgence in pulses and coarse germs. And modern in the sense that it qualifies architecture (or history or languages) has strayed far from its root which means 'what is of today'. Modern in this sense means adherence to the dictates of the usual bunch of modern 'masters' with their pathological hatred of ornament, stupid aphorisms, contempt for the past, arrogant determinism, mistrust of beauty; most of all it means technologically dependent.

There would be no point in repeating all this save for the dreary fact that modernism in this anachronistic form is still very much with us. This is extraordinary when you think that the nouveau roman, which also explored a minimalist cul de sac, has been dead for years and that 'contemporary' furniture belongs with beehives and Brylcreem in a so far largely unexhumed part of the past. Of course TV and the prints (I don't except this article) feed off the exceptional and blithely disseminate the impression that architectural modernism is long gone. Not so – the evidence on the streets points unequivocally in the opposite direction; just look at what is happening in Tottenham Court Road, on Euston Road, at Hammersmith, at several sites in Covent Garden and you will see that the excesses of the past 30 years are being rehearsed ready to open to a public whose apathy is its own worst

enemy. Old architects very rarely change their spots. The vulture Seifert who has hovered over and swooped upon prominent sites since the fifties is now perpetrating a new 'caring', 'sensitive', 'fitting-in' sort of excrescence; Sidney Kay and Firmin (a litigious bunch who dislike rhymes on their name) are still in there and so are the rest of the old gang who served so loyally in the heady days of the property boom.

Just how thin on the ground alternatives to this Hack's Mannerism are is surely shown by the journalistic reliance on just a few names and places to justify the claim that there is something different and not so nasty in the woodshed. They are cited time and again: Stirling, Graves, Moore, Venturi, Krier etc., and in this country Gough, Dixon, the Hillingdon Centre. Drops in the ocean, pebbles on the beach, topers on Sauchiehall Street. The only practice in Europe never to have toyed with international modernism and to have succeeded on a *big* commercial scale, big enough to attract international attention, big enough to be invited to build new towns in countries other than its own, big enough to earn from Giscard of all people the plaudit 'the greatest architect(s) in the world' is a most singular Catalan outfit called the Taller de Arquitectura, aka Ricardo Bofill after the man who set it up in the mid-sixties and still leads it.

'International architecture is worthless' says Bofill, 'since it is the result of technology rather than of culture.' Now Catalonia and particularly Barcelona is a place with a marked sense of itself; separatist and nationalist aspirations have a long history, not least because it has long been more economically successful than the rest of Spain; it is culturally alien to centralist (i.e. Castilian and Madrileno) norms. All this might lead one to expect that a Catalan architecture born of that culture rather than (as is the worldwide norm) determined by the latest available technology would be parochial, insular, self consciously 'different'. That is to reckon without two things: Barcelona's cosmopolitan complexion, which Bofill has wilfully reflected in the composition of the Taller; and Antonio Gaudi who is the architect of that city to a greater extent than Nash or Wren is of London, Bernini of Rome, Juvarra of

Turin. Any Barcelona architect has that great trolley bus victim towering over him and the shadow is doubtless daunting to the fainthearted.

Style has long been a dirty word to architects educated in the grey conventions of modernism. Mention it to them and you are met with raised eyebrows and an indulgent smile – the professional's apparatus of contempt and disdain in the face of the 'lay' public. Style, these professionals who have wrecked cities from here to the other end of the earth will tell you, is 'irrelevant' or, worse, a sort of frivolous whimsy; a building's function is what matters and, kiddies, form follows function. It is adjudged a success if it 'ruthlessly expresses its function' as they say; it is also expected not to disguise its method of construction, which might be considered irreconcilable with the revelation of function. But there you are. These petty rules are rot. A library is no more functional for looking like a factory or a slaughterhouse and exposing to the world the means of its construction than it is for looking like a miniature Blenheim; it would most tellingly reveal its function if it looked like a book. No, the truth is that functional is another word like modern which has been appropriated by the old architectural establishment, divested of its meaning and given a new one. 'Functional' does indeed signify a style, albeit a styleless one. It is inappropriate but nonetheless convenient to pretend that the gamut of devices open to the architect constitutes a language; the vast majority of today's architects are ignorant of any language but the makeshift pidgin of modernism and the languages of all past societies and civilizations are incomprehensible to them – they cannot 'read' them, let alone 'write' them. It is as if the entire world had learned Esperanto (a contemporary of the first blooming of modernism) and forgotten its mother tongues. 'International language,' says Bofill, 'only serves as a code of signs, not for writing *The Divine Comedy*.' Quite, and the pidgin (four grunts, an asthmatic wheeze, a cough and a hawk) that architects know is a closed book to those unfortunate enough not to be of their number. It need hardly be added that this much abused 'lay' public does not want to and should not have to

'learn to understand' buildings; I mean, we can all avoid Stockhausen and Pinget and the sillier sorts of minimalist sculptor but buildings are dumped upon us and it seems preposterous that the architectural equivalents of these hugely elitist (i.e. appreciated by a tiny elite of, mostly, their fellows) practitioners should lay down the law. Architectural modernism constitutes a sort of aesthetic (and, it follows, social) totalitarianism. The Taller's work, both in the means by which it is achieved and in what it offers its users and spectators, is democratic, verging lately on the stylistically populist; it is replete with, so to speak, extra-architectural interest. Whereas the post war buildings to which we are used are bereft of all but the most meagre associative, emotional, sensual content the Taller has long realized that of all arts or endeavours architecture is the one that must on no account be allowed to grow in upon itself like a cancer, or to sit like a mute guest and say nothing.

Gaudi was never afraid to look to the past; even after he had abandoned historical models and embarked upon the marvellously original and frequently geomorphic buildings for which he is most famous he was not essaying novelty for novelty's sake. From the outset the Taller has displayed a similar awareness of the (pre modern) past, an awareness which rests this side of reverence but which in the mid of the white hot technological sixties was eccentric at best, perverse at worst. And the first slice of the past that had to be explored and, maybe, paid homage to was that of Gaudi himself. Of course trying to follow Gaudi must be like trying to follow Joyce; it is probably the *gesture* that is important. The Taller's work in this manner – they are by no means the only local architects to have openly alluded to Gaudi, something that makes Barcelona a most exhilarating city – pointed them in a direction from which they have not subsequently erred. This might seem improbable when you survey the bewildering range of projects they have undertaken; a single direction seems indiscernible. What I mean is that certain tenets were established then and still prop up the whole bizarre structure.

* * *

In the western suburbs of Barcelona, way out past Campo Nou stadium whose grass is the only green grass in the city and is tended like a magic carpet on which swarthy giants do battle, is sited the group of converted cement silos that is the Taller's workplace. It is an odd enough sort of office but it pales into subfusc normality beside the composition of the group that works there. Peter Hodgkinson, the longest established designer, is English and a qualified architect, though he has never worked in this country; Ricardo Bofill dropped out of architecture school and doesn't draw anyway, though in his teens and early twenties he worked with his father who is an architect and builder (a combination that professional regulations prohibit in this country); a dozen or so further architects work there – they are Catalan, Belgian, French, Basque, American, Italian, Swiss, Argentine. All normal enough, despite the apparently cavalier disregard for paper qualifications; but the Taller has from time to time also included one of Spain's leading poets, a literary critic who is now a socialist deputy for Catalonia at the Cortes (and who was for 2 years a political detainee under the Francist regime) and an economist. Hodgkinson (whose brother Tim was saxophonist in the band Henry Cow and now has his own group Work) used to drum for the jazz rock outfit OM; Bofill and another member Manolo Nunez have directed a full length film . . .

It is as if Bofill anticipated by a number of years the widespread public expression of abhorrence at the sort of cities that were being built and acted to ensure that lay opinion, the voice of the ordinary Joe or Jose, was always loudly to the fore. The role of the poet Jose Augustin Goytisolo was indeed that of the non-specialist, non-architect user of a building or environment. How radically different such an approach is from what pertains in this country where architects are wilfully deaf to the points of view of non-architects may be illustrated by a remark made to me by the editorial director of the Architectural Press. Following the transmission of the TV film *City of Towers*, Christopher Booker's apt attack on high rise buildings, their architects and patrons, this gentleman invited Booker to lunch in order, he told me proudly, 'to put

him right'. The import being that because Booker is not an architect what he had to say was worthless. It is hard to imagine such complacency afflicting Bofill.

Conservation groups have burgeoned in this country not just because of an appreciation of old, and not so old buildings, but because people actually fear what will replace them. The inclusion in the Taller of singleminded and articulate non-architects whose very purpose was to question and nag seems to have ensured that their buildings accord with the users' expectations and needs; it also seems to have caused the Taller's designers to relearn much of their art and so work in a way towards genuinely popular ends. Next to the cement silos stands a vastly complicated apartment block designed in the late sixties; it recalls termitaries, honeycombs, fortresses, ruined vaulted cathedrals. It is called 'Walden 7'. Now the first Walden was the pond in New England beside which Thoreau found a 'natural' prelapsarian paradise. The subsequent Waldens are those of the behaviourist B. F. Skinner who believes, against all evidence to the contrary, that the human race can be conditioned, programmed; he has concluded this after years of experimenting with incentives and punishments to rats and pigeons. The Taller's Walden acknowledges that all building inevitably – though to what degree is moot – conditions those who live in it, work in it, pass by it but attempts to show too that freedom of choice can actually be succoured rather than stifled in high density blocks. There is a complicated interplay between the public and the private (Catalan experience and expectation is needless to say very different from the British); the block is built around five courtyards and the very least that one can say in its favour is that the paradoxical paranoiac combination of feeling at once exposed and claustrophobic which afflicts those who live in most cluster blocks does not occur here, simply through ingenuity of planning. It is worth noting that several members of the Taller live in Walden 7 – which is a bit different from the form displayed by this country's titled vandals who design unworkable habitations for others but live themselves in agreeable Georgian piles, piles which they are too arrogant to learn from. Walden 7 is

also architecturally heterodox in that it challenges the old modernist doctrine that buildings should be deterministic – modern architects are among Skinner's most baleful disciples, 'knowing what is good for other people' is second nature to them.

During the seventies the Taller's work became more and more overtly classical, further and further away from the current mainstreams. A municipal housing scheme built in Gaudi's native town of Reus and named after him had attracted French attention and two invitations were received: to design a new neighbourhood for the desolate northern French new town of Cergy Pontoise, and Giscard commissioned the Taller to proffer some remedies for the awful excrescences of La Défense in western Paris – La Défense is like the South Bank culture ghetto but about thirty times the size. During this time Bofill began to earn the reputation that he has got today as a fixer, a hustler; the scheme at Cergy Pontoise – an extraordinary and very big variation on the more gothic elements of Walden 7, called La Petite Cathédrale – was scotched by the Minister of the Interior, Michel Poniatowski. It is quite possible that Poniatowski thought the design was taking a rise out of the French, the thing looked like a mad parody of every gothic cathedral you have ever seen, a quarter of a mile long with a 'nave' full of shops. As a sort of consolation prize the Taller was allowed to become involved in the subsequently farcical business of Les Halles; it was during this period that Giscard called Bofill the world's greatest architect when defending him against Chirac, who was eventually to have his way and have Bofill's just-started scheme demolished. So maybe Giscard's boast is to be taken no more seriously than any other utterance by a politician; but mark, he did not say 'best', and greatness is what the scheme invited. It succeeded in reconciling monumentality with human scale and humour, gaiety – neither of which is any more common in recent French architecture than in British. What has happened at Les Halles subsequently is so banal as to defy description. The Taller's interests were not well served by being pushed by Giscard; old story of central government interference, which is a pity because the

design was quintessentially Parisian – all arcades and columns and unforced formality. It was clearly born from an appreciation of and fondness for Beaux Arts planning; but such appreciation, such fondness were, not without some shade of truth, reckoned to represent opportunism. However that sort of opportunism is undoubtedly preferable to that which is manifest as gimmicky slaves to technology like the neighbouring Centre Pompidou, already as dated as Mokes and Gonks and things.

Despite these rebuffs the Taller was now established in France. In and around Paris as well as in both Spanish and French Catalonia and a number of other sites as far apart and culturally disparate as Houston and Rotterdam it is at the van of a gradual swing towards classicism which should, by the end of this decade, be in full flight. By the end of the century, then.

Classicism in architecture is associable with, *inter alia*, revolution, absolutism, the idea of 'natural beauty', the cult of the primitive, the triumph of reason and so on and on. It is foolish to assume that neo classicism is 'fascist' because Hitler's lackeys employed it for stadia, just as it is foolish to assume that it is 'Stalinist' because it is the style of the Moscow underground and numerous bureaucratic hives in that city.

Bofill has grasped that what made most modern architecture, and especially domestic architecture, so ghastly was not its size but its incoherence. He has also grasped that the dogma of 'truth to materials' is precious, arty but artless, a sort of ascetic, aesthetic luxury. The Taller's espousal of classicism would seem to indicate a desire to impose an order on cities and individual buildings that is recognizable and familiar, and if machines have to be made to imitate old crafts in order to establish that order, all well and good. Machines should be the servants of the human race, not vice versa. But is this new, revived order likely to prove any more congenial than what it succeeds? Well, yes. One might suggest that just as there are only a limited number of story plots and a limited number of dishes that can be cooked and that these recur throughout history and in different societies (pasty, samosa, piroshki,

empanada etc.) so there are only a few architectural archetypes to which we are capable of responding. And the wilful break with the past that the moderns essayed was bound to result in failure because it entailed the eschewal of these recognizable archetypes. The Taller's classicism is mostly bold and grave and powerful; it occupies the large space that exists between on the one hand American kitsch classicism, jukebox Georgian and on the other the straight copyist stuff of architects like (like? – there is no one else playing this game) the Englishman Quinlan Terry whose stuff looks like forgeries of the 18th century. (E.g. The new church hall on Paddington Green.)

Most system built (i.e. industrially prefabricated) architecture looks just that, it is bereft of any indication that it has been designed by a human; the machine which made the parts seems to have vanquished the designer – if indeed there was a designer. The machine is the instrument of 'alienation'. (Why so many architects should be fascinated by computer design is a matter of wonder when you consider that most of them seem to have been aping computers for some time now.) The Taller's greatest 'betrayal' of modernism is its demonstration of the fatuity and sophism of this idea of 'truth to materials'. Materials are to be overcome, (literally) moulded, developed for express purposes; the Taller makes a design then achieves the technology to allow that design to be built – something, you might think, that should be common-place but is in fact far from the norm. Peter Hodgkinson calls his recent stuff 'heavy duty, industrialized classicism' – in other words he is trying, and succeeding splendidly, to reinterpret timeless archetypes by modern means. At the factory outside Lyons where the prefabricated components for the Taller's Parisian developments are produced one of the world's leading concrete technologists is working on ways of oxidizing the material so that it will resemble marble, limestone and so on. Le Corbusier would turn in his grave, and living Lasdun in the living graves he has slung up all over London. But Michelangelo, Bernini and the true giants must be smiling – after all they made marble into flesh and wood and silk.

Ricardo Bofill himself is now 40; he is a sort of star in Spain

and France, where his 'polemic', his manifestoes about Les Halles established him and, further and more important, caused a general re-awakening of public interest in new architecture which, it realized, could actually be good. (I mean the untutored public could actually realize, gut wise, that it was good without having some old fart like Casson drivelling on and trying to fool it with gush about the poetry of board marked concrete and spatial orchestration and so on.) Bofill takes on, on his own terms, governments, promoters (developers without the bad connotations), and the hard city bosses who are so much a feature of European domestic politics. He has been talked of as a possible minister of planning but is probably too much of a maverick to accept such a post. Besides, his politics have little to do with parties; during the Francist regime he was a Marxist, a member of the illegal Communist and Catalan parties, but these were then the only oppositions. Now he seems to practise expediency, opportunism if you like. He is an impresario who enjoys power and setting up the opportunities for the Taller to infiltrate existing structures. When the Taller was invited to build socialist desert settlements in Algeria it set up its own office *within* the existing Ministry of Housing and designed a village which could be made from materials fashioned by the villagers themselves. This worked fine and provided jobs and foreign currency for Algeria. But meanwhile Polish and Russian entrepreneurs set up factories to make the usual high rise blocks, and though these were to cost Algeria far more the Taller was sent packing.

'No more third world adventures for the moment,' says Hodgkinson, claiming that even Bofill's nous and grit capitulate before the might of eastern bloc state capitalism. He is also unsure how Bofill would cope in Britain whose central and regional governmental systems are so strange to Europeans, and besides there is no money for public housing . . . Hodgkinson knows though just what he wants to do here. He wants to build Bath.

This is not quite as megalomaniac as it sounds. Had design as inspired and popularly acceptable as the Taller's been employed at places like Cumbernauld and Runcorn and Milton Keynes they would not be so desperately desolate as

they are. And the Taller believes that with the experience it has gained using heavy engineering practices at its French sites it can build quicker, more cheaply and more efficiently than anyone in the world. That this is not a boast is shown by the French Ministry of Housing's willingness to suspend local bye laws and building regulations in the case of the Taller's projects, so high quality are its specifications even though they might not accord with local practice. Failing being granted the chance to build Bath or reinterpret some other grand set piece of 18th century planning Hodgkinson reckons that the Taller could well be used here in the role that it is currently fulfilling in four of the major French conurbations, Lyons, Montpellier, Marseilles, Toulouse – that of 'urban doctor'. The governments of these places, and of some smaller ones like Dreux in Normandy, have called in the Taller to try to sort out the dystopias created by modernist planners during the sixties and early seventies. Though solutions obviously vary from place to place they invariably use classical means – the square, the circus, the arcade and, most vitally, the street. It is no doubt the replacement of the street by the precinct, the mall and the whole gamut of ambiguous and pretentiously named spaces that has accounted for the abject failure of modern planning.

How does this apparently blanket application of classical devices accord with Bofill's contention that international architecture is worthless? Surely he is replacing one universal language with another? How can Hodgkinson's plan – already at prototype stage – for individual, prefabricated, build-it-yourself classical villas in kit form, however can such a plan be said to be the result of culture, independent of technology? The only answer can be that classicism touches some nerve in all of us, that it is not an *imposed* system, that it uses technology rather than lets itself be determined by technology, that it is ultimately humane and coherent. The cyclical nature of history indicates that the classical is eternally returned to after periods of confusion so, no doubt, now is just the right time . . .

1980

The Alleys of Barcelona

This is Barcelona. This is Catalonia. This is not the centrist, Castilian fiction called Spain. Nonetheless:

'Mañana.' That's what tiny Toni at reception says when you ask when your tan and navy grip (years later to be blagged from the back of a hired jam in Malaga – also not in 'Spain') is going to show. Said grip has obeyed graffito law and gone solo to Tunis or Bari while you breakfasted in London and lunched (anxiously) here in Bcn. The midget jobsworth sort of smiles in confirmation – only *sort of* because the whole show would do something terrible to the baby Etnas all round his mouth. And you sibilate gratitude. And you're ten steps across the Ex-O-Teek panelled hall before the echo strikes. The word repeats on you, a tympanic belch. Man tossing yah-nah. How dare he? It's clear for all the world to see that he's the sort of stunted gimp who'd, oh, tear the gold fillings from his just dead mother's mouth, who'd . . . How do you say smegma breath? You're going to give this one a chunk of your mind, a lump of your tongue. But this is Catalonia which may not be Spain but which is close-ish. So you'll wait for tomorrow, but you mean it. You really do. To this end you spend tomorrow morning doing up brandies in a bad-oil gaff in the Plaza Real: Fundador (George Best's favourite, as in 'Slup doon t' thu poo-ul and enjoih a copple o' Fondadawes after'), Carlos something or other, and, best of the lot, Lepanto – which was a battle site and is thus an appropriately belligerent bevvy, the proper fuel for those who'd take on the iniquities of baggage pashas and hotel moguls. You get back to Toni's bastion by forcing one foot to overtake the other, and again and again, till it becomes a serial habit. The wood and bronze rhomboid handles on the plate glass doors are there to be

pulled or pushed so you do both and make an entrance that is more effective than elegant, a spring driven jerk towards the intended victim of your spleen who sits behind the 'desk', a counter veneered by the metre and littered with a key, a plant in a bowl, a pen in a well and there – at the far end, against the wall – a tan and navy grip. Toni smiled, just a bit; he *knew*. I got to like him.

The hotel was the Gaudi (the only name that I, guidebookless, could think of to give the cabbie at Sants station where the airport train terminates) and the year was 1977. Since then the matter of where Spain ends and where Catalonia begins has grown more not less moot. The Sunday before my baggage went awol La Pasionaria, the 'legendary' (is there a geriatric leftie who isn't?) civil war leader, had returned after some four decades of exile and pulled massive, adulatory crowds to a meeting at Montjuich; but the adulation, as it invariably is in such cases, was sentimental, a sort of homage to its subject's former being. The legend's ranting was dated, embarrassing, she was tilting at devils who had disappeared, whom she must have known had disappeared – but the left tends not to function without fascist oppressors and if such oppressors have died or been given an early bath they have to be imagined . . . The trouble was that even then, just two years after Franco's death, with the 'fragile' democracy hardly established it was already clear to the Catalans (who are nothing if not canny) that they had more to gain from being part of a federally organized country with some kind of regional autonomy than from pursuing the separatist ideal; the point being that the pursuit would be arduous, costly, most likely to stir the centrist military, altogether a bad bet. The result has been the establishment of an allegedly autonomous state with a president, Jordi Pujol, whose salary is higher than that of the Prime Minister, Felipe Gonzalez; with schools that conduct lessons in Castilian and tend to treat Catalan as a foreign language; with a tendency in industry and the professions to promote only Catalan speakers . . . Roadsigns, public posters and so on are now written in Catalan, a language dense with the letter x – Dali's favourite US president was Nixon, on account of the spelling of his name. The armed

militia of Franco's day has gone and has been replaced by a scummy guerrilla force of pimps, thieves, smack peddlers and their 55,000 dependents. Where the blame for anything used to be put on Madrid, it is now 'the liberalization' that is ubiquitously culpable (it often is); there is yet no specifically Catalan backlash to the street crime, porn, inept policing – but it will come, soon enough. The linguistic anomaly I refer to above whereby preference is shown to those who speak a language not taught in schools save as a foreign study means that native Catalans have a vast advantage over the immigrants from (mostly) the poor southern provinces; thus a form of linguistic apartheid is practised, and it is manifest as separate *economic* development in the gulf between the opulent suburbs and high standard public housing on the one hand and the ghettoes and shanty towns on the other. From the point of view of the casual visitor it has tended to render Barcelona a cartoon of itself.

The Barrio Chino is a wedge-shaped labyrinth of 'oil, piss and shit' (Jean Genet). Genet lived there in the early thirties, thieving, hawking his brawn, idolizing sailors, dressing *en femme*. During the dictatorship its endemic trades were covertly practised. Now they've come out, how they've come out; they've spread on to the Ramblas and the Parallelo, the two great avenues that contain these dark, rag littered, foetid streets of tenements. They've come out like the puss oozing from a stinking brie. Transsexual and transvestite whores lie across the bonnets of cars. Pimps with bloodshot eyes and unwashed hair and ulcerated arms practise bodily assault on their girls. There are girls with dogs and girls with wigs and girls with tracks all over every inch of exposed skin. A woman of about sixty dressed in beige sobriety comes out of a shop with two whips and weighs them in her palms, cracking each in turn and assessing their merits before making her purchase (trade discount). The Barrio Chino is habitually a no-go area for the police. Two victims of American buddy-cop movies, Ros and Andi, who were assigned to a camera crew I was with in the city last autumn, were very happy to tell me stories of busts and overdoses and Fagin-caches but were also adamant that they'd never enter the area save on a planned and,

presumably, heavily armed expedition. Should I be troubled that I find this noisome quarter (which has given its name to red light areas throughout the hispanophone world) so attractive? The only beauty here is an invert one; it is physically dangerous; everything is sullied – the whores with ill-advised diets, their wretched gits, their washing stretched across the street, their rooms, their bars, their johns; there are cripples, cripple-dogs, funny farmers, berserkers. It is the densest, scariest pox-maze I've ever seen. And while my head drives me on, my heart tells me to go back. To my balls, incidentally, the whole enterprise is of supreme lack of interest – if I was a punter I'd shop elsewhere; the part of my sexual curiosity aroused by the place is not that which concerns itself with the consummation of an erotic possibility. This is not a place where you need to muzzle your libido – the beast won't want to bite unless it's starving.

Though the night streets of the Barrio Chino are eternally teeming they are not *animated*; the desperation of the lives led there, the malnourishment, the penury, the forced idleness, the opiate stupor militate against that. Now and then a pagan blood-dance – a dervish arm that ends in a blade, a clacking of fugitive heels, a screech, a contortion that no one makes because he wants to – now and then such a tableau quickens an alley but the only time I've seen it all jumping was when an American aircraft carrier's crew was mis-spending its few hours ashore. Remember: such vessels are dry, such vessels carry no joy division, such vessels are manned (apparently) by racially harmonious lamebrains of fifteen years old. No naval pocket went unpicked. No boy sailor learnt his lesson the easy way. The entire populace of the barrio turned out to fleece these welcome intruders – knickknack floggers, old tarts and older tarts, harbingers of euphoria and prophylaxis, boys with sisters (the Moorish connection). Here was commerce. And here in its wake came the Navy Police – 280 lb albino gorillas from the boondocks swinging nightsticks the size of an amazon's dildo, swearing like, well, Navy Policemen at hearts-of-gold and blackguards and lily-innocents. The gorillas turned over clubs, flushed out peepshows – they should never have let their boys ashore in this city. They should have known

what those months of want combined with the sight of the cars along the side of the harbour would do; the sea defences stretch for a mile or so, like a causeway to nowhere. A road runs along the top of them, and beside the road there are parked cars jigging on their springs, their windows opaque with transformed breath. The liaisons within them can hardly be licit, or can they? Maybe couples enjoy the pretence of risk. I don't know; I do know that these car congresses happen all over the city, especially in those parks which have roads through them. In a Seat, beneath an acacia at Parc Guell or Montjuich, at the moment you read this, someone has a handbrake in the small of her back but knows better than to complain, for it will all be over very quickly. All this bonk on four wheels has spawned an audience of voyeurs *who have their own clubs* and contact each other through small ads in respectable papers. No doubt it is the difficulty (scratchy shrubs, stray dogs) that makes this kind of bimping so much fun, for if you simply want to see two (or more) men (mostly) parking their Packards in different garages this is the city for you. The Bagdad Club on the edge of the Barrio Chino advertises *actuaciones reales y actos sexuales no simulados*, and they mean it. Ros the Cop who was going to take me never showed so the following information is based entirely on a scrutiny of the photographs around the establishment's exterior and lots of hearsay. 1) The performers are no beauts – but then if you could do anything else you would probably do so. 2) Yes, that man has got a canteen of cutlery stuck through his penis and, no, I don't know whether he removes it after the show. 3) The dogs and the mule that used to work here were struck off the bill after animal welfare spoilsports had threatened to take the management to court. What is so fascinating about the place is the question of what the performers' domestic lives are like. Has that woman of a certain age and a certain depth of Leichner who sits down with the scarred man to eat zarzuela and drink white Peñedes just turned herself inside out and mocked all intimacy for the delectation of strangers and a (probably) meagre cheque? Has she?

What you have read is just a paragraph in the book of the

city which is the greatest of the Mediterranean and the apogee of the South – by which I mean that more than anywhere else it is contaminated by fairgrounds, morbid catholicism and the fanatical anticlericalism, colour, the acceptance of the Fall, fantastical buildings, machismo, coffee et cetera. Further, it is a city which is a magnet to all who seek the fearful enticement of vertigo: its hills plunge and swoop and afford vistas that render it a map of itself. And beyond that, above that, is the ubiquity of cable cars which put your guts in your mouth. You take them at your peril. You might say the same about Barcelona: I came initially for Gaudi whose work is a microcosmos that includes everything of the city. I come back for the cosmos.

1986

Glasgow '83: Jimmystoun

The colour scheme of this city's buses represents its sectarian division. It is a tonally uncomplementary compromise, orange and green – the one for Prods, the other for Papists; and the fact that the orange is on top is just the way of this world for they have the best jobs, the best churches, the best marshalled means of self assertion.

Early on a Saturday your dream is gradually filling with the lardy faces and piggy bigots' eyes of King Billy's men, Paisley and his like, with bowlers and tangerine sashes and hurdy-gurdy batons – all that stuff. And when you wake you are, of course, getting a binaural pasting from the drums and martial fifes that prompted such disagreeable inner pictures. And when you've bathed (this with difficulty – the water's soft as mucus and no match for soap) and you go out in search of the marchers they prove peculiarly elusive, like a ghost band that is always a block away, like the orchestra that plays the score but is never seen. Actually you do see them now and then, blocking one of the swooping vistas in which central Glasgow abounds (the place is built on a grid plan, on hills). They are accompanied by horsepolice, like football yobs – which is apt since they double up as supporters of Rangers, the all orange outfit that will not have Catlicks on its staff; these are the people who turned over Barcelona after the Cup Winners' Cup Final a decade ago – one of their many wrong ideas was, presumably, that the Catalans they were groin-booting were Papist bastards. Like I say, wrong – the bastards they were groin-booting were anti-Catholic Catalan atheists most likely: Glasgow and Barcelona have much in common but not religion.

This was not, mark, the big march to commemorate the

Battle of the Boyne – that takes place on 12 July; this was merely one of the ever more frequent 'rehearsals' that the Orange lodges (creepy, quasi-masonic organizations) go in for. They end up in Queen's Park in the south of the city where they can listen to Roy Jenkins's (very) defeated opponent at Hillhead, Pastor Jack Glass, fulminating against Rome, Papal plots, Sunday drinking, the ghastly Billy Connolly, old Runcie ('Robert the Romanizer'), Jews, Moslems, Prods who allow their children to be treated by Catholic doctors etc. Glass has an absolutely admirable record – thrown out of a British Council of Churches meeting for yelling 'Popehead Coggan', arrested in Nairobi, deported from Switzerland and prone to refer to eucharist wafers as 'blasphemous biscuits'.

And of course he abhors idolatry, though the monument to John Knox is nothing if not idolatrous; it stands high above St Mungo's Cathedral at the peak of the Necropolis and comprises a Graeco-Egyptian column (Thomas Hamilton, archt.) and a verisimilar statue of the old fanatic on top. The whole city is beneath him, whole *cities*, rather, that no doubt suggest all the corruption, guilt, depravity that he, after Calvin, ascribed to mankind. If he could see, if only he could see in the dark then he'd see across the gorge of Wishart Street on a Saturday night to the infirmary – a building so big that you marvel at the capacity of so many people to get ill at once. His posthumous gaze takes in the subs and wrecks and drossheads that litter Casualty: Here's a woman whose husband did up two bottles Lanliq, one Eldorado, one Four Crowns, couple of Emva then did her. Here's a boy that got his cullage cut in a backlands stramash; thowless evermore he'll never generate any of these condom-faced gets – I'm talking barber shop Durex, not Fiestas. You see this face everywhere, sperm-white and distended *and* bony; its ubiquity is sometimes whimsically attributed to the softness of the water which is also supposed to fur up arteries and promote heart disease. A likely story. Ba's.

It's drink and diet that do it. (Sometimes it seems that drink *is* the diet.) A lot of white bread is eaten, made whiter by a copious dusting of flour after baking. Mince and potatoes are much appreciated. In chippies everything – mutton pies,

pasties, pizza, haggis – is warmed up by being lobbed into deep fat. Tea is taken very milky and very sweet. The ice cream manufactured by numerous Italian immigrants is so sweet that you fear you can feel it boring through tooth enamel. Drinks of the Tizer, Corona sort like Irn Bru are swigged all around you. Whisky is commonly diluted with lemonade and is commonly drunk to one end – self obliteration: here there is a peculiar and potent correspondence between the city and its inhabitants.

The rash, parasuicidal leap (it's a stumble, actually) of the far-gone wino is matched by the way that the city (the council and its staff of cretinous experts) has tried to wipe itself out. The *visual* result of this is – forget the pathetic fallacy – a battlefield in which an ever diminishing group of incomparable nineteenth-century buildings is surrounded by lout-blocks of the past quarter century, lumpen invaders from an altogether loathsome architectural culture. The decision to build Metropolis on the site of the very greatest Victorian city was not too clever – needless to say the usual bunch of titled vandals was involved (I suppose that they're now improving heaven with ring roads and 30 storey 'gestures') and so were the usual bunch of bent officials, greedy contractors, feeble minded local politicians. The result is staggering, a gross cartoon against the notion of 'progress'.

As the city has modelled itself in the image of its least fortunate sort of inhabitant so has its least fortunate sort of inhabitant struck back. *If what you're given is shit, shit on it.* There are scenes here of epic desolation – in the Gorbals a housing scheme less than a decade old has been abandoned because of damp and its crass blocks are lent a pathetic grandeur by the grass and trees that are already overtaking them. These are the invaders that got zapped. Beside them stands one of the saddest victims of Jimmy's Lightning, Greek Thomson's Caledonia Road Church.

All around it swirl strips of polythene and shreds of paper, and cans jangle when they touch its walls. All over the city there are these patches of no-man's-land. Sometimes they are surrounded by the pink and black forms of old tenements –

windowless, doorless, roofless, shelter for the helpless – sometimes they are surrounded by a factory emitting a reek of burning bone and by an inky ribbon of canal constellated with the bodies of unwanted pets. They are always bright with litter like broken bunting. They are always circled about by obese, vulturine gulls that float on the persistent gusts that are directed here and there by the hills and the heaps that crown them.

In the shadow of ruined tenements near Govan are parked twenty or more caravans with washing lines strung between them. Clothes fill with breeze just above the mud and ash mix that you always find underfoot, here the mud is so sticky that the waste paper wriggles on the spot like amputee canaries. On the expanse between another burnt out church and – 's Bar ('Yi' can gets guns there, yi' can get smack there, this city's *riddled* wi' smack') are the pigeon lofts some boys with wild hair have built from the wood fencing that surrounds an abandoned housing scheme.

On all these patches are broken prams and bales of barbed wire and autumnal sheets of corrugated iron that can still boom when the wind makes an effort; there is enough broken glass here to stick into wet cement on top of the walls of very many mansions (on those walls are sprayed the green slogans of the IRA and INLA). And so many of the people who scuff across this pitted cityscape wear bandages, and so many are packed into mean little Jap-plaid jackets with fake-fur trim, and so many are so fucked by life and bree and dope that no one believes you are straight when you say it's the most exciting place, the most vital – after all slow deaths can be exciting to watch if you're of that disposition. But that's not all the story. The vitality is not *simply* one that is dependent on death – like the fungus that can form a mycorrhiza only with the flesh of a dead horse.

Partly it's topographic: This is probably the hilliest city in Britain, perhaps in northern Europe (Glasgow belongs more to Europe, I think, than it does to Britain). The effects are varied and some of them are marvellous. From across the Clyde the central and the inner western suburbs have the aspect of, well, of something that is foreign to these islands –

of a Baltic port maybe. And riding the switchback of the central city streets you might be anywhere but Britain. The pattern is, as I said, a grid and the buildings are mostly classical – ranging from eighteenth-century boxes through the great mercantile piles of Glasgow's prime to the monumental Chicago school stuff of the Twenties. Indeed, in the whole place there are few secular Gothic buildings and when you do come on them they seem vaguely shocking, also a bit undignified. Glasgow's most famous architect is Charles Rennie Mackintosh, a man whose typographical style has found its way on to carrier bags in a way that Beardsley drawings did fifteen years ago – I've no doubt that his stuff is familiar to everyone. The place's greatest architect is Mackintosh's precursor Alexander Greek Thomson. This was a man who made buildings that are *mighty*, there is no other word; even in dereliction they have a weight and strength out of all proportion to their size. Many have, characteristically, been demolished. Thomson's influence is everywhere and thanks to him and his epigoni Glasgow had a homogeneity (which doesn't mean monotony) that few other places could match; even now it has a vestigial splendour which the cretins have not quite destroyed. The trouble though with being so hilly is that it gives the cretins somewhere to put their awful slabs, hence the illusion of invasion; I suppose, given the modernist aspiration towards totalitarian design, that the cretins who are still alive would be rather pleased to learn that post-war Glasgow is frequently used by film makers as a stand-in for Russian and East German urban locations.

But there are still entire areas where you can remain oblivious to the battlefield, and these areas are not necessarily particularly chichi, e.g. the working-class toe of the Hillhead constituency (where Boy Woy was offered a glass of wine between babies' heads and found that it was Lanliq, which he had to drink so as not to cause offence). What is remarkable in these areas is the sheer standard of 'everyday' design achieved by long forgotten Victorian architects and their assistants; it merely reinforces the commonplace that these men could do with still fairly primitive instruments what Spence and Esher and Casson and Luder couldn't do with the

most sophisticated technology the world has seen at their disposal. All that the post-war architects here learned from their predecessors was to build *big*, they quite forgot the lesson of *scale*.

Partly what gives the place such vitality is that unlike most of provincial Britain it doesn't look to London. Why should it? I repeat, it feels like a great European city rather than a British (i.e. English colonized) one, and even in decline there is a vigour about the way its people have largely made a mockery of the institutionalized altruism of the welfare establishment and of what is called architectural determinism; the fact of 'natural selection' or, if you prefer, the unfairness of things is recognized far more acutely than in southern England; this maybe has something to do with Catholicism – it is certainly the Catholics who have been the underprivileged down the years. The polarization of the moderately rich and the very poor is very obvious. The ubiquity of beggars and the attitude displayed to them ('they're like fleas') is more suggestive of Genoa or Naples – both of which are magnificent in their decay – than of say Turin, which is magnificent, flourishing and twinned with Glasgow. (It is a great pity that before they could pay a civic visit several members of Turin council were gaoled on corruption charges.)

This adjacence of beggars and fat cats, the sight of a Roller panthering (why?) through a self-blitzed estate of newish slums, the curiously docile resignation of the punters in sepulchral daytime pubs and vast snooker halls – these are snapshots more from a jungle where everyone *knows his place* than from the city which Lenin saw as the base of British revolution. Of course you do get upsets in the jungle, but they're about as frequent as Stenhousemuir's defeats of Celtic. No: what we have here is – not despite, very much because of its foreignness – a perfect paradigm of the tough better Britain that we're going to be seeing a lot more of. How's that, Norm?

1983

Notes From North Britain

You are left in no doubt that you really are in Scotland when the first vehicle that you see after crossing the border is a Hillman Imp hearse. It is, if you like, a four-wheeled attestation to the notorious parsimony of the North British. Whoever else could have thought of such a thing? An Auvergnat? Certainly not a Jew. The stereotypical meanness of Jewish jokes and antisemitic calumnies is very different (*creative*, crafty, dissembling) to that attributed to Scots (plain mean); avarice implies an accumulatory aspiration, parsimony is, well, just a craving for saving, the inordinate desire to hang on to what little we have got.

In the front of the hearse are two starchfed gravemen. They are big men, too big for their vehicle; the scale is all wrong, they make it look like a toy hearse. The way that their pink bodies with ginger hair in all the crevices want to expand through the windows and into the back where McDead is all boxed up and ready to go under does not enhance the idea of funereal dignity. Their soapy faces bear veinous traceries that suggest whisky inside and embalming fluid outside. Now that they are out of everyone's earshot are they still speaking in euphemisms? (The speech of undertakers is so circumlocutory that they have a euphemism for euphemism.) Or are they wantonly profane, talking like dirty boys about the body behind them, recalling McDead's peccadilloes? I'll bet they are. The dolorous cortege creeps along and none of the mourners considers the way the object of their grief and source of their legacies is being defamed. Just before the cortege turns off the main road it passes a police patrol car parked in a lay-by; in this car are four hatless rozzers, each with a pint of milk in his mouth, like babies in blue.

Diet. Scots do not, *pace* the Scottish Tourist Board, eat nothing but fresh salmon, Arbroath smokies, grouse, venison, oatcakes, cock-a-leekie and so on. On the contrary they eat mince and potatoes, pies and potatoes, fish and chips. There are countless carry-outs where these rudimentary foods may be obtained. Ask for a pie in a carry-out and it will be lobbed into boiling chip fat to warm it through. (There is a far higher incidence of heart disease in Scotland than elsewhere in Britain though this is sometimes rather wishfully attributed to the softness of the water.) Of course there are restaurants where you can get fresh salmon, smokies etc but they are invariably run by interesting artistic couples who devote more energy to the invention of twee folkloric names for dishes than to the dishes themselves and who crawl into the wretched *Good Food Guide* by dint of their dreary proscriptions on smoking.

So. Stick to potato crisps, whisky and beer. And, since it is impossible to obtain decent wine save at the Central Hotel, Glasgow, drink whisky with meals if you must have them. This is, perhaps, not good form but it is practical and easier on the tongue than brewer's claret or Corrida. But like I say, crisps, whisky, beer, in the proportion two packs, eight measures, one pint, constitute a good meal before an evening's serious drinking. And an evening's serious drinking, Jimmy, means just that.

The practice of chasing beer with whisky is an admirable one. So is that of chasing whisky with beer. That of diluting whisky with fizzy lemonade, bottles of which are to be found on all bars, is reprehensible; it is of course a means of disguising the taste of blends but there is little reason to drink these when single malts are everywhere available at prices not much higher than those you have to pay for Teachers, Haig etc. Measures are a fifth rather than a sixth as they are in England.

In Yorkshire, say, anyone who speaks standard English in a bar is liable to be approached by a chippy regional chauvinist and lectured about Boycott's supremacy, the softness of life south of Doncaster, the beauty of Barnsley's Parkinson Piazza.

Scotland is not like that, such ghastly conviviality is notably absent and the dedicated solo toper is not regarded with suspicion; even in Glasgow bars are often fairly quiet, conversation is not allowed to get in the way of consumption. Glasgow public houses are by no means as frightening or violent as their reputation would suggest. The odds on escaping without major injury from a pub in Ruchill or Govan are really quite good, save perhaps at weekends when you stand as good a chance of getting crushed as of being slashed; indeed the mêlées are often so thick that a) you could suffer a heart attack and remain on your feet, supported by the bodies around you and b) there is no room for anyone to swing a flat hat with a razor sewn into its peak. I actually have no idea whether this trad street weapon is still employed, nor am I certain if the abominable recipe for oblivion – coal gas bubbled through milk – is still current. In both cases, I suspect, these *were* features of Glasgow, the satanic city where the Forth and Clyde canal is full (as Colin MacInnes said of the Grand Union near the Harrow Road) of dead cats and used condoms and where the tenements are fire-blackened and fit for no man.

This city has not disappeared; rather, it has been intruded upon and surrounded by the buildings and roads of the last 25 years – Glasgow is the greatest extant monument to Victorian commercial might and imperial confidence and at the same time the most strident indictment of post-World War II architectural banality. Both of these on a big scale.

Glasgow has much in common with Barcelona. (It is not for nothing that it was Rangers fans who rioted there 10 years ago – they are Protestants and, quite probably, ignorant of Catalonia's anti-Catholicism; 'fuckin' Spaniards, Papist bastards, all o' them'.) Both these cities enjoyed their greatest prosperity during the second half of the 19th Century and in the years before the Great War; both are, or were, great ports; both fostered singular architectural traditions. Glasgow cannot match the wayward genius of Gaudi (whom, had he not existed, nobody would have thought of inventing) but it did produce some marvellous architects, the best known, though not perhaps the best of them being of course Mackintosh who

owes his reputation in some measure to his having been acclaimed as a precursor of the Modern Movement. (It is most odd, the way that Modernism's apologists and champions claimed on the one hand that they were breaking with the past and on the other that they had the force of tradition behind them.) When you see Mackintosh's stuff in Glasgow (and he built little elsewhere, though there is a house he converted in Glebe Place, Chelsea) rather than on the page of a book it is liable to disappoint precisely because it so very patently has the force of tradition behind it – you can see where it came from, that far from being *sui generis* it is the culmination of a Glaswegian school of design which was altogether remarkable not least because of its independence from the rest of Britain.

If you go south over Glasgow Bridge past what remains of the Gorbals towards Langside and Mount Florida and you turn to look back what you see is emphatically not characteristic of Britain. The skyline and the sheer breadth of that boulevard suggest a great continental city and this feeling is maintained in all sorts of different ways. Mackintosh's greater precursor was known as Alexander Greek Thomson. This truly remarkable architect, whose buildings have been shockingly treated down the years, was prolific in a variety of, evidently, Hellenic and other classical styles (including Egyptian) at a time when the rest of Britain was fervidly gothic. His contemporary influence outside his native city was minimal, but there it was vast and as a result Glasgow remains a place which is largely unmarked by the Gothic Revival – Sir George Gilbert Scott's University building is the only major secular building in the gothic style, though there is inevitably a number of churches. Thomson must have seemed hopelessly 'out of date' and his disciples even more so – one of them, Alexander Skirving, built his last church, in Langside, in the mid-1890s, about three-quarters of a century after the Greek Revival had run its course in the rest of Britain. Glasgow's classicism is on a grand scale – there are swollen elephantine columns supporting the heaviest pediments that you can imagine, there are buildings that appear to have been created for giants, there are common-or-garden details which assume a strangeness

because of their sheer size. The effect of rather forbidding grandeur is enhanced by the city's having been built largely in sandstone blocks. Sandstone, whether 'white' or red (pinkish actually, from Dumfriesshire), is at its best when black with the soot and smoke of ages. And the stone-cleaning craze which has so marred London and Paris by making old buildings look brand new has not yet caught on in a big way.

The illusion of Glasgow as a continental city is further fostered by the way that people go out and walk about on Sundays (when lots of shops are open) and by the fact that the majority of the population live in flats and do so quite happily – just like, well just like everywhere but England. Glasgow is a splendid city in a foreign country (I mean that) and I do not think I'm mad to recommend it as a good place to spend a week's holiday. In fact I once heard of someone who went there voluntarily.

Above Aberdeen late one November afternoon I saw the most beautiful sky I've ever seen. The sort that makes shepherds swoon and makes drivers neglect the road ahead. It was a fabulous cassata of Cambridge blue and crushed strawberry, the thickness of whose stripes and the intensity of whose colours was consistent, unvarying. I was on my way to Perth, another town full of good classical buildings. I thought I was on my way to Perth. As night fell and the most beautiful sky I'd ever seen disappeared lots of fog crept out to play and the convoy of skygazers turned into a slugtrain moving at about 15mph, lots of peering, lots of jerky brake lights, lots of passengers drawing blood from their lips. I saw a sign that said Brechin was two miles off the road. Crisps and whisky called.

Leslie Martin is, I believe, the name of the man who reads out the classified football results on BBC Saturday afternoon telly – he has a trace of a Northern Irish accent. I like to think that he saves himself for the Scottish scores and especially for Scottish Division Two scores where he reads with gusto the names of towns which exist, if they do exist, merely for the convenience of Littlewoods and Vernons – Morton, Motherwell, Hamilton, Falkirk, Airdrie. Brechin is such a pools coupon town. Even though it has a cathedral (which the fog

stopped me finding) it seems hardly large enough to support a team whose weekly fortunes may decide the pecuniary fortunes of, who knows, a syndicate of typewriter mechanics from Edmonton or, even, you and yours. I did clock a stack of corrugated iron which is the stadium where City plays and in the hotel I clocked my fellow guest. He was a forward sort of fellow who was a teacher of tax inspectors. Fun? Well, no, not really but he was certainly faithful in the way that a dog has found a new master is faithful – he tagged along behind me as I staggered about the wintry and largely invisible town and kept telling me the names of new and better whiskies; the more he drank the more voluble he became and the more morose I became. I liked the bits when it was his round but the rest was ghastly – all tax lore and family snap-shots. I thought I had seen the last of him when we returned to the hotel and said goodnight; I was wrong. Next day – the shepherd was right, it was clear and bright – I was 30 odd miles south of Brechin, parked on a verge staring at Glamis, when he saw me, drew up, complained about his hangover and told me the plot of *Macbeth*.

I looked for Raith and couldn't find it: the Rovers play at Kirkcaldy although this didn't prevent Kenneth Wolstenholme announcing once upon a famous victory that 'There will be dancing in the streets of Raith tonight'. St Mirren, if it ever was, was somewhere to the south west of Glasgow, near Paisley or Maxwelton. This latter was Annie Laurie's place, where the braes are bonny, where early falls the dew and all that. What Annie and her suitor would think of it now I cannot imagine. The industrial belt on this side of the Clyde is seemingly interminable, like that to the west of Birmingham. There is nothing remotely bonny about it and if there ever is dew in Ferguslie Park then it is probably swarf grey and toxic; this is where Britain's mightiest thyroid cartilage comes from, it belongs to the footballer Gordon McQueen.

Troon, which Ms Laurie could have reached from home without having to negotiate the planned delights of East Kilbride, is notable as a place where golf is played at night. The beach is of the sort that is deemed fit for children, i.e., it

is so wide that the kiddies are liable to give up out of fatigue or boredom before they have reached the sea. At dusk strong warm breezes blow in from Arran and young things gallop big horses along the beach. Later *le tout Troon* piles into the place where I'm staying and tries to drink the place dry; leading the effort is a small man with a big wife and a jocular manner. You've met him – a nickname for everyone, an opinion on everything, a simulated dislike for his wife which probably masks a real dislike, a purple beamer, a cardigan that acts as a corset, a pair of Japanese tartan crimplene trews. Later, after the bar has closed and the lights are going out all over Troon and the singing has stopped I was walking on the beach when I heard a furious muttering from behind a dune. The last thing I felt like witnessing was a Troon coupling and started to head in a different direction when from over the dune appeared an unmistakable figure hitting sand with a mashie and stamping like an irate child. He saw me. 'Hae ya seen my ball?' he asked quite seriously. 'Jus' one shot and I loose the damned thung. Tha' makes four this week.' And with that he was off, swinging his club and muttering.

1982

High Street, UK: Reading

Wilde's face is matt with bad shaves and grey from bad diet and bloatedly luminous from the secondary stage of the spirochaetic plague that killed him and it's held down in a foetid slop pail at the bottom of a wall whose tiled bricks he knows the number of (he's had the time to count them over and over) and it's screaming mutely because he's being punished again for his transgression of a stupid cruel law and the means of that punishment is a parodic enactment of his crime which here, *in carcer*, is no crime but the screw-sanctioned norm. The inflictment of anal rape on sodomites is fine behind bars, this is a gaol in which those who were too clever by half can be shown just how clever they really were.

That ignominious term is the first thing we associate with Reading which is now host to a new, utile, commonplace cleverness, the sort of cleverness that base minds and the societies they build do not take retribution on because this cleverness is one that is – notionally at any rate – levelling. (And if 'levelling' is a proscribed word in this Darwinian decade then replace it with 'liable to give everyone who works at it a fair to even chance'.) What I'm referring to is the silicon implant the town and its surrounds has willingly yielded to, this is what makes the place that extra bit special, this is what makes it a Super D-cup kind of place. This is what is supposed, anyway, to have happened . . . The next two things we associate with it are biscuits (Huntley and Palmers) and television's idea of the place. You'll get biscuits later; now you must be reminded of the telly link. Reading is the BBC's middle England, anytown; this is where The Family, the hapless and prolix Wilkins, lived lives which enjoyed no

evident purpose till they were chosen to get celluloid embalmment in the most engrossing documentary series of the 70s. Again, Reading is the manor of the Thames Valley police, elected to suffer a kindred fate three years ago. I doubt if this is fortuitous, nor do I believe that it is ascribable to the BBC's torpor – the town is only a few minutes down the M way from Shepherd's Bush but it's not that simple. The notion of 'anytown' is as bogus a conceit as Tony Benn's 'ordinary working man'. But you can see why Reading might be thought to qualify: it has a *neutrality*, a transparency; it promotes no preconception of itself in the way that do, say, Brighton (louche, fast) and Bristol (mercantilely stolid, 'cultured') and Glasgow (massive, hard) and Liverpool (wit born of adversity). The qualities granted to these and other towns may of course be quite wrong, but that's not the point; the point is that they have entered the public conscious, they are part of an English tradition. The idea of Reading has no place in this tradition, Reading is no use to the stand-up comedian, it doesn't *mean* anything, it's nobody's shorthand. And it is not so placed that it stands for a region, and, besides, just what are the perceived attributes of Thames Valley inhabitants (who have no toponomial handles – they're not like Geordies, or Taffs, or Scousers, or even, more prosaically, Bristolians or Fenmen. They own no name)? The Welsh are full of low cunning and mad about education, the Scots are so mean they use Hillman Imps as hearses . . . No, it really is very easy to see why it's typical of something or other; it's like a colour so pure you don't see it.

Here are some of the things it is typical of:

a) *Those (French) towns which make a big thing about local produce, the walnut oil towns and the prunes-in-Armagnac towns.* The trick there is to turn the entire town into an eternal trade fair with folkloric integrity laid on impasto, the words 'artisanal' and 'fermier' (in its adjectival sense) figuring big in all the bumf and point-of-sale presentations. Reading's local produce now is computers and the place is thick with showrooms. There's Computer Options, there's Apricot (an uninspiringly derivative name), there's one just across from the

Ramada Hotel. Computers are of course potential enhancements of life as well as being instruments of post-literacy (i.e. the new illiteracy), so just why they should be associable in their makers' eyes with such decorative sternness is a mystery. Well, not that much of a mystery – the panchromatic chaos of an amusement arcade, say, would not suggest seriousness, but the tasteful greys and uncluttered spaces and airport lounge furniture which these showrooms go in for is a bore; and there is, too, something dispiriting about the salespersons. He has a little moustache and a modest pro-footballer hairdo and a taste for the products of multiple tailoring; she has the stiff neatness of a make-up counter assistant. And if you don't believe these generalizations go and look for yourself. There is another mystery about the preponderance of these places in Reading: they occupy prime city centre retail sites as if an assumption has been made that the people of Reading are likely customers (which they are no more liable to be than are the people of a more populous city like Southampton where there is a dearth of such showrooms). Maybe these 'functionally' wrought establishments have a meaning, a role that is more than commercially functional; maybe corporate cybernetic wisdom has it that Reading's 'identification' with chips and software is assisted by the presence of these showrooms; maybe the stereotypical salespersons are employed because they *look like* salespersons and would, actually, be incapable of flogging a cup of water to a maroon in the Sahara. If this is (the improbable) case then it is a rare instance of Reading's preoccupation with 'image'.

b) *Those towns whose shopping facilities were subjected to big scale redevelopment in the frightful sixties.* This, it goes without saying, does make for correspondences with nearly everywhere in these blighted isles. Reading's contribution to the nation's store of shopping centres with roofs is The Butts, opened in 1972 to designs by the distinguished firm of Sydney Kaye and Firmin. This is not just a distinguished firm but, further, one with a sound knowledge of Britain's iniquitous libel laws and so I shall say no more than that it is absolutely tremendous and that it takes its name from the adjacent street St Mary's Butts which, in its turn, is doubtless named after the boundary

mark or archery range that was here. It has no connection with the word 'butt' meaning 'object of ridicule'. By the entrance to The Butts is a boutique with a sub-Benetton window display called Digital, those seven letters being printed on the fascia in a 'computer' script; this seems a touching essay on the part of the rag-trade to show solidarity with (or cash in on) the town's new industry – after all, there are many more thrilling names you can give your boutique, indeed thinking of a name is probably the most agreeable part of the entire enterprise. The shops within are strivingly down-market. Turners Shoes – not, as far as I know, part of a chain, which makes it an oddball here – has two shops opposite each other, and the men's was full of vicious looking winklepickers of the sort I was forbidden by my parents (unfairly, I thought as a thirteen year old. But I realize now that they could spot a downwardly mobile shoe when they saw one). Beside this window with its pedal correlatives of teen violence, switch-blades and 'going all the way' is one with foot-square mug-shots of chirpy youngsters called Dean, Hazel, Lorna etc, the 'team' at She Hairdressers. Dean, Hazel and Lorna looked like they'd all submitted too often to each other's scissors and curling tongs. But this crimp-shop and a bleached-pine and dried-flower nightmare near it were about the only places in the entire precinct which did not look like natural backdrops to the alleged vespertine rituals of handbag snatching, free-form mugging and gratuitous bodily harm that The Butts area is now renowned for – see c). The area to the south east of The Butts and opposite the flint-chequered church of St Mary contains a market whose stallholders are predominantly Asian. Their prices are keen; but the produce they offer, both in quality and range, is as dismal as that in The Butts. Reading is not like the outmodedly industrial cities of the north and midlands, it's not on the breadline, it's not a dole town, it is not pocked with marks of penury – when you come upon a graffito it is apolitical and insignificant of want and anger (it most likely swears allegiance to a heavy metal band). And yet – the quality, OK the sartorial and gastronomic and decorative *choices*, of a Reading life is akin to that of a place far worse off. The streets of this town are alive with the minimalist music of

computerized tills, yet each little burst at the checkouts registers more, not better. What is bought is the same drear stuff but in greater quantity than in the soot and scrap towns of the Trent and the Calder and the Tees. Affluence doesn't carry with it the lesson of discernment, and shops don't go into business to 'educate' their potential clientele. It is a commonplace that the old variety of small shops that occupied our town centres is lost; it is an equal commonplace that they have been replaced by multiples. It is a less frequently recognized truth that in lots of places the grip of these multiples has been loosened during the last decade by small outfits run by the new shop-owning class – the bourgeois enthusiasts for unpackaged food, designer threads, affordable antiques, cheapish but drinkable wine, books, and so on. Reading is almost void of such establishments. There is a 'delicatessen', with misspelt sausages from Europe, there is a bookshop with a very few hardbacks, there is a wine-bar (more misspellings, I'm afraid), there is an old fashioned game dealer. The existence of these shops doesn't for a moment dent the over-riding impression of Reading as a predominantly working class and lower middle class town, a biscuit-fed town. Its Victorian villas (the local style, aped in some very recent commercial buildings, employs harsh combinations of red and yellow bricks and lots of faïence) have not been seized back from multiple occupation by a gentrifying professional army of solicitors, academics and so on. The more affluent of these people live in the surrounding villages, the less affluent in 'executive' estates that are creeping over the meadows to the east.

c) *Those towns whose inhabitants boast of a high crime rate.* This is a ubiquitous form of inverse snobbery. We in the Welsh Marches/the Fens/the Somerset levels/the New Forest have the highest incest rate in Britain. We in Weybridge/Alderley Edge/Solihull have more burglaries. We in Kendal/Bournemouth have a greater incidence of illegitimate births per thousand births . . . There are, as I say, good mugging opportunities in The Butts. Outside the Butts too, in an architect contrived wasteland of car-parks, civic offices and handy magistrates courts – here there's a meagre tri-partite sculpture of a cartwheeling man that commemorates the 'twinning' of

Reading and Düsseldorf. It may be meagre but it shines among the stylistic cacophony of pebble-dash cladding and bronze glass and bright red brick and concrete ramps. One of my crime rate informants was a tobacconist, the second was a cab driver who also told me that in twelve years I was the first person to ask to be driven round Reading, the third was a barman in the aforementioned Ramada Hotel. This is Reading's 'international' hotel, a many storeyed yob block of the 70s, the work of some timidly aspirant John Portman. Inside it are keenly jocular businessmen and their wives who just can't get their dress right; there's a buxom girl playing 'standards' on a piano; there are brightly coloured cocktails with things in the glass to poke you in the eye when you lift it. Outside the hotel there is, past the businessmen's car fleet cars, Crime. That, anyway, was the barman's story. The way he had it Reading is the sort of place that makes Palermo look like a crèche. He said this was because the kids had 'nothing to do'. I said that even had they 'something to do' they'd probably do crime too – the way of the world and all that. He evidently considered that to be misanthropic and cynical, not the kind of thing he wanted in his bar. He gave me a look; I was paying the price of being too smart. I was also paying the price of drinking Perrier and not giving him the chance to do his nifty Pina Colada wrist action for me. So I sloped off towards the gaol tempting the lurkers and the meat-axe boys and the bullies with blades in their blousons to jump me just the way their banged-up precursors used to jump Poor Oscar – well, not quite that way perhaps. No takers.

d) *Those towns which are in a perpetual state of tectonic metamorphosis.* That makes it typical of nothing today. Twenty, ten years ago many provincial towns were building sites. And Reading must provoke a nostalgia in those who were excited by what Frank Price did for Birmingham and T Dan did for Newcastle and smaller fry like Tony Stocken did for Salisbury: wherever you look there are buildings under construction. Against the dusk-pink sky a man 150 feet above the ground on a parlous girder guides down another girder from an entomoid crane and strikes a silhouette that is the paradigm of *heroic* in the social realist, dignity-of-sweat conception of

heroism. It is, honestly, rather stirring. And, contrary to all expectation, there is a swagger to a lot of the new buildings – a branch of John Lewis has massively assertive pitch roofs like overlong skirts and the new public library is brazenly neo Edwardian and by the river there is somebody's design that was surely intended for the Gulf – which may be emotionally if not environmentally apt. There are, to be sure, many rather half-hearted new efforts too, not least on the massive developments by Wimpey, Bovis and so on at Lower Earley. 'Biggest estate in Europe,' said the cab driver. That may not be the case, but it certainly does stretch. 'You got executives and you got normal families too.' The houses are zealously variegated; I tell you, Tudor isn't what it was fifty years ago. There are no pubs, no churches, no playgrounds, no phone boxes. This is the sort of place where you see the triumph of domestic insularity, a triumph that is occasioned economically by the manufacture of computers and sustained by the sub-culture (or anti-culture) of that same technology. It is the most numbing sort of ghetto and, chronically, far more dangerous than the bad alleys round The Butts. Maybe I'd feel differently if I had been sprung on . . . As it is the only thing in the centre of the boom town that alarmed me was a conger eel, as thick as my thigh and two yards long, which hung from a rank of hooks in a fishmonger's window. What was so alarming was the benevolent expression it wore, as though it held no grudge against its murderers, as though it had no idea of the cardinal harm that had been done to it, as though it didn't mind a bit what the people of Reading were going to do to it when they got it into the closet privacy of their homes.

1986

This Year In Marienbad

All the world knows Marienbad: the statues, the match-game, the broken glass, the swooning Seyrig, the voice that incants, 'Once more I walk on, once more down these corridors, through these halls, these galleries, this structure from another century – this enormous, luxurious, baroque, lugubrious hotel where endless corridors succeed silent deserted corridors . . .' All the world knows this Marienbad, Alain Robbe-Grillet's invention brought to a sort of life by Alain Resnais at Nymphenburg near Munich and at another Bavarian schloss, both loci two hundred miles south of our west Bohemian spa which was already then, when the film was turned in 1961, called Marianske Lazne. Marienbad does not exist. Nothing could be less astonishing; after all, this town in a bowl of pine-crenellated hills is a town of the Sudetenland which was ignominiously ceded to the Third Reich in 1938 and whose Czech inhabitants were expelled with what they could carry. That it should shun its German appellation is as natural as well water (140 springs, 8–10 degrees Celsius, carbonated, used in the treatment of renal, urological, respiratory, rhinitic, asthmatic, digestive, endocrinal and metabolic problems – among others).

And yet . . . the place is far from innocent of its past. And it is forever contaminated by its filmic representation. This must sound preposterous, the suggestion that Robbe-Grillet's work can somehow be taken as naturalistic or reportorial; but, walk along the corridors (lugubrious, endless) of the New Baths and you begin to conceive of *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad* as a synthesis of all valetudinarian reveries. One corridor gives on to another then a third, and they're all the same: a plastic chair; exposed pipes hurrying to the vanishing point; a static

man; the smell of coke (no, no – the stuff that's like coal); another static figure, this one a woman, waiting, like the man, without expectation, with a blue card in her hand. They wait in silence – this is a national talent; they wait for balneotherapy, hyro-inhalations, cold hoses, spring gas injections, massages, mud packs. They wait to spray their gums with water as a prophylactic against gingivitis, they wait to swim in rubber caps in silence – at a Czech spa swimming bath the only sound is of lapping water turned white by a cupped hand, a crooked arm. No one talks or dives or squeals with aquatic delight. They take their treatments seriously, and they believe in them. What water placebos have over chemical placebos (the sort that is normal in virtually spa-less Britain) is the lack of side-effect. It's a low risk means of therapy, it's thus analogous with the political system that promotes it and pays for it; it may not get you right but it won't make you iller than you already are; and it's slow, its effects are gradual, it props you up. It could of course bore you to death, but it won't kill you. It won't foster alopecia the way adriamycin will but then it won't stem cancer. Scepticism about the efficacy of well water is not confined to the British though the British are alone in Europe in having no state owned spas and the British, despite their ever increasing consumption of mineral water, are the one nation that doesn't frequent Czech spas – everywhere you look is a Kuwaiti or a Russian or a Hungarian. The doctor who is director of the spa at Marianske, Miroslav Skapik, suggested over lunch (healthy bouillon, unhealthy fat in batter) that there was a schism within the Czech medical profession on the subject of waters: 'There is a wall.' But, he went on, no one disputes the therapeutic as opposed to the medical benefits of Marianske Lazne or Karlovy Vary. As we strolled near a statue of Red Riding Hood, a local girl who found fame in a political allegory, Dr Skapik's medical director (mad boffin crewcut, mad boffin specs with lenses ground from Dimple glass) explained with a giggle – I think it was a giggle – the therapeutic benefits which everyone is agreed about: 'Patients get rid of the negative effects of everyday life. You know cybernetics? We re-programme them, we re-programme people.' Was I really hearing this? It was like

going to France and seeing slit-skirted tarts and winos in berets, it was like going to Spain and being told 'mañana'. This was the Czechoslovakia of a sinister sitcom, stereotypically horrible. But he looks such a nice little mad boffin, I caught myself thinking. Did this man really deal in re-educative mud packs, was he really an agent of terror by cold hose? The perverse potential of baths cannot be overemphasized. But no – people come here to enjoy themselves; that, anyway, is how the Czechs see it. There are countless stories and gags about infidelities at spas, drunkenness at spas, dancing the night away at spas. But although people come by themselves, subbed by the state, spouseless, cash-heavy, spruce in new threads from the fashion mecca that is Prague, looking for a Good Time, the prevailing air is one of innocence earnestly indulged. It's all rather like the more sedate sort of British resort a long time ago – Scarborough in the 30s, say. Which is as it should be, for sea bathing stations and wells share a history and a common purpose – albeit a purpose which is now forgotten, to re-create the spirit and recharge the body, i.e. to 're-programme' it. Not so sinister after all. Common purpose, common pursuits, common architecture. Whether the suffix is *sur mer* or *on sea* or *bad* or *wells* or *les eaux* or *spa* doesn't really matter. All resorts are more like each other than they are like the market or manufacturing towns of their own countries. They all have the same ad-hoc nitespot, it probably *is* the same one, it probably travels like a circus. This year in Marienbad the eternal verities are being reinforced: in the back room of a fin de siècle hotel, in a bar complex like that of a straitened polytechnic, in the former ball room of the casino middle aged men who understand the sartorial language of popular entertainment (butterscotch suits with black lapels, shirts with frilly fronts like mail-order lingerie) are playing chugging versions of 'Volare' and 'O Sole Mio' on flimsy electric organs, on metallic carmine guitars. And newly met couples enjoying freshly minted flings gambol with ever decreasing inhibition till they dare dance *le slow*, cheek to worker's cheek, wiggling a little the way those re-programmed into youth always will. It might be Bournemouth, it might be La Baule. And so might the buildings which are

rich, francophile, encrusted with ornament, gay in the old sense. The encrustations are anthropomorphic: caryatids, atlantes, canephorae, herms, terms, satyrs, hercules. They are so wrought, these great plaster figures, to look as though they are holding the weight of the buildings they adorn. And the women among them are clearly on steroids, their musculature is freakishly bulgy; often they're orgasmically enrapt like Bernini's *St Teresa* though the modelling owes more to that great artist's great predecessor. What we have here is Michelangelo by the tonne. I reckon that these writhing figures are an invitation to lubricity, triggers of holiday romance.

The Robbe-Grillet/Resnais film is not the only French representation of this town. There is too a song by a marvellous singer, quite unknown in Britain (as are most exponents of *chanson*), called Barbara. In her Marienbad there is porphyry, there are jade castles, there are diamonds and black nights, there are aubades; most of all there is her heartbreaking voice and a violin to make one shiver at the thought of lost love. Hers is the Marienbad of the old regime, before the town became a popular utility. There is an odd and wittingly fostered disjunction between the popular utility and the props of the old regime which are being zealously restored. It is as though a set is being reconstructed for a dramatic spectacle of a different order to the one that was originally played on it. Marianske Lazne is becoming a museum whose one exhibit is its former self: the 'colonnades', an airy glass and iron structure of c1890, where spa guests drink in their numbered mugs from fountains of spring water, has been done up with a diligence that would delight British conservationists. The New Baths where Edward VII used to lie in Ottoman splendour will be good as new by the time of their centenary in 1993. In the park through the middle of the town every tree is made to weep so that at dusk they have silhouettes like old English sheep dogs – this is the only canine facet of the place, there is no excrement on the crewcut lawns. Everywhere you'll find (wooden) scaffolding, houses being given a tosh of paint; even the paths in the dark woods are bereft of the usual sylvan decoration of torn tights and discarded balloons. It all seems

too good to be true; and when you get to Pilsen you realize that it is. When you see that great beer city, a Bohemian Burton on Trent, you realize why people need spas, why Marianske Lazne is such a haven. Perched over Pilsen as you approach it from the west is a vast mushroom of industrial smog, a mushroom without its stipe supported by some maleficent magic, a mushroom the colour of a nicotine knuckle. There's more yet: this city of unrelenting terraced palazzi, Florentine in provenance and grandeur, looks like a Piranesian nightmare. It looks like Berlin, 1945, but in the aftermath of a *really* bad war. The air is constellated with black particles like would-be bats. The buildings are sublime in their soot-fleeced dereliction. No wonder the workers of Urquell and Gambrinus and the Skoda car plant crave the water and uninfected air of Marianske; no wonder Dr Skapik repeated to me that there is no industry within 25 miles of Marianske and that the air is 'allergen free'. No one who sees Pilsen will ever again take for granted Clean Air legislation.

So the baths at Marianske witness now a gamut of industrially related skin diseases that would never have been seen in Marienbad. You see blisters of every size and shade, you see rashes and weals, you see skin which mimics burnt vinyl. And so on. And if this is what their outsides are like what about their insides? Can water really work on organs which are the victims of such atmospheric abuse? Or is what we have here a secular Lourdes? If it is it's a handsome one. There can be few nicer looking spots in which to kid yourself that you're doing yourself good. It wills you to think that way, so much so that you'll return, next year, to Marienbad to do yourself good, whether you need to or not. Re-programming is a process as endless as the corridors.

1987

Alain Robbe-Grillet (1): Precision

Alain Robbe-Grillet's critics have for the most part taken rather too seriously his ponderous pronouncements on man, the world and the novel, and have, as a result, devoted a great deal of space to pointing out (quite correctly) that his theoretical writings frequently don't correspond to his fictional practice. There's really nothing very surprising in this: despite his claims to the contrary his essays which are collected in *Towards a New Novel* are manifestos which go as far as to set down rules about what the novel ought and ought not to be, and presume to instruct anyone who delves therein how his novels should be read; further, they possess the air of being a not too subtle exercise in self-publicity, designed to provoke a furore in French literary circles. Which, of course, is what they did, and Robbe-Grillet was being anything but honest when he simulated surprise at the generally hostile reaction to them. Thus he achieved in the mid-fifties a reputation as a kind of *enfant terrible* (yes, another), whilst obscuring the fact that as a creator of fiction he was highly original and ingenious and much more of a poet than he liked to admit.

His first two published novels, *The Erasers* and *The Voyeur*, are his most conventional, but throughout them there are hints at the direction he would take in his more mature work – both make use of non-linear chronology, melodrama, 'sensational' subject matter, both present imaginary scenes as if they were 'real', feature as 'hero' obsessive and pathological characters, and contain those long and quasi-scientific descriptions of inanimate objects which have become his 'trademark'.

The Voyeur concerns a man named Mathias who is revisiting his native offshore island and who there probably sexually assaults and murders a little girl on a deserted cliff. From the

opening page of the book clues to Mathias's obsessions are liberally scattered and repeated – we learn that as a child he collected pieces of rope and string, and the first action he performs is that of picking up a coil of hemp cord, rolled into a figure of eight, from the deck of a ship that is about to dock. Simultaneously he notices a young girl of eight years old, 'her hands were clasped behind the small of her back, her legs braced and slightly spread'. Rope, a young and provocative girl; together with the iron ring set in the edge of the landing slip that is approaching they are the leitmotivs about which the author forms his fiction. I don't think it's very important to debate whether or not Mathias's crime is 'real' – all that matters is that he believes it to be so and that he convinces himself that he is guilty, returning to its scene to destroy evidence whilst being assailed by images of the dead child. It is worth noting that Mathias is a watch salesman, a peddler of chronometers; and he alone realizes that what he is selling – the idea of clock time – is a fraud and can be bent by him to cover his trail. *The Voyeur* seems to me to be the least successful of its author's works, it is too much of a technical exercise, a 'laboratory novel'. Robbe-Grillet had not, when he wrote it, devised the radical structure on which he would build his later fictions, nor had he shed the more conventional trappings of *The Erasers*, published two years previously in 1953.

Roland Barthes seized on *The Erasers* when it appeared, lauded it as being a great anti-humanist novel and by suggesting that its chief importance lay in the descriptions of objects slighted the author's considerable achievement in writing a quite outstanding 'metaphysical detective novel'. Wallas, a special agent, arrives in a Netherlands town to seek the murderer of a Professor Dupont; in a parody of any other sleuth's quest he follows all sorts of leads, treads mean streets and blind alleys and ends up by killing Dupont, who had been in hiding, and who was, perhaps, his father. Of course, the story is a reworking of the Oedipus myth, and just as Joyce in *Ulysses* wearied of drawing parallels between his story and that on which it was based, Robbe-Grillet by calling his work *The Erasers* (after some rubbers for which Wallas searches), seems to be suggesting that although he might flaunt a wide variety

of parallels with the legend he is more concerned with obliterating these connections. I think the main attraction the legend holds for Robbe-Grillet is its symmetry – it is a closed circle; the action of the book lasts 24 hours, and takes place entirely within the confines of the Boulevard Circulaire which borders the town. These limitations are very important: they suggest a stage set, and the theatricality of the book is reinforced on practically every page.

The story opens with a manager arranging his café in preparation for the day's customers: 'But it is still too early, the street door has just been unbolted, the only person on the scene has not yet recovered his own existence . . . When everything is ready the light goes on.' Further passages designed to give the 'feel' of myth create also the illusion that the book is an invention of a performance rather than of 'real life', for example: 'Things take their immutable course. With calculated movements.' I say invention of a performance rather than description because Robbe-Grillet uses in *The Erasers*, as in all his other novels with the exception of *The Voyeur*, the present and past indefinite tenses. The past definite, or preterite, as Roland Barthes has pointed out, expresses 'a closed, well defined, substantival act', and hardly lends itself to the construction of novels in which contradiction and uncertainty play an integral part.

It is telling that Barthes, as well as being an important commentator on Robbe-Grillet, should also have been a vociferous champion of Brecht's strictures on the distancing of an audience. Robbe-Grillet has always been at pains to point out that his readers witness not a model of the world, nor indeed a representation of it, but an opaque literary reality; of course, good reader, there's nothing very original about such an idea in itself but the way in which it was turned to practice in *Jealousy* was startlingly original. Totally abandoning linear chronology – one might almost say chronology itself – and using a first person narrative without ever writing the pronoun 'I', Robbe-Grillet shows us the world through the eyes of a jealous husband, and at the same time shows us this man surveying and constructing from the objects around him, from

snatches of conversation, from perhaps quite innocuous gestures, a fantasy featuring his wife A . . . and a neighbour called Franck. The title itself, *La Jalousie*, is a pun on jealousy and the type of slatted blind found in the tropical plantation house where the action takes place, implying that the narrator's view of the world is distorted (which it is) as if he was constantly staring through a blind (which, intermittently, he does). The total effect is not unlike that achieved by Polanski in his film *Repulsion*, where Catherine Deneuve finds men bursting through the walls into her room – it is realistic yet fantastic, unerringly precise but quite impressionistic.

However, it is far from being cinematic, as some commentators have suggested; rather Robbe-Grillet exploits the shortcomings of the novel as a creative medium, realizing that the more accurate, the more minute a description is the more blurred and unclear becomes that which is being described, until the description virtually negates itself. So the reader reads and sees nothing behind the words themselves; this is part of one of several long descriptions of a banana plantation: 'An oblique row begins at the log bridge, at the right, and reaches the left corner of the garden. It includes the thirty-six trees in its length. The alternate arrangement makes it possible to consider these same trees as being aligned in three other directions: first of all the perpendicular to the first direction mentioned, then two others, also perpendicular to each other, and forming angles of forty-five degrees with the first two. These last two rows are therefore respectively parallel and perpendicular to the direction of the valley – and to the lower edge of the garden.'

Such descriptions are not as purposeless and arbitrary as Robbe-Grillet likes to pretend. They have a sweeping, mesmeric, almost hypnotic effect on the reader, who soon begins to see through the eyes of the narrator. Nothing remains innocent, even A . . .'s laughter when Franck overfills her glass and the way their eyes catch each other's seem to the suspicious mind to be threatening signs. In an almost musical way the book builds to a climax; a centipede, 'of average size (about as long as a finger)', which Franck crushes with his napkin one night at dinner re-appears (in reality? in the

imagination?), now 'it covers the area of an ordinary dinner plate', again Franck crushes it, but his napkin (la serviette) is transformed into a towel (la serviette) and as the creature falls to the floor he makes his way back not to his place at the table, but to the bed where A . . . awaits him. 'In his haste to reach his goal, Franck increases his speed.' But things are not quite what they seem, the waggish manipulator of our minds has 'dissolved' through the bed to Franck driving recklessly with A . . . at his side. Their car leaves the road and bursts into flames. In his acutely paranoiac imagination the narrator has murdered his wife and her putative lover having discovered them *in flagrante delicto*. He has, if you like, achieved a release, he has, like the helpless centipede, been crushed by brutal muscular Franck. And despite the reader's awareness that Robbe-Grillet has placed a sort of gauze between book and world the insistence of his prose makes one 'live' the situation far more profoundly than would that of a conventional novelist describing events 'from the outside'.

The apparent objectivity of gaze in *Jealousy* should deceive no one, the fantasies, the transformations are rigorously selected and totally subjective. They are also often very witty; whereas *The Erasers* is about a performance *Jealousy is* a performance and sometimes the author lets drop his mask to make an aside, a comment on how he pulls his tricks: 'And Franck's car appears, brought into view through the window quite naturally by the conversation.' Talk about somebody and he appears – thus the primacy of the imagination and the hold it can wield over its quite conscious possessor is demonstrated by a sort of dramatic irony, which if it is not recognized as such might lead the baffled reader into calling for the prosecution. Raymond Chandler stated in *The Simple Art of Murder* that if the mystery novel is at all realistic (which it very seldom is) it is written in a certain spirit of detachment. Otherwise nobody but a psychopath would want to read or write it.

In actual fact, Chandler is a precursor of Robbe-Grillet, who undoubtedly has a taste for such authors. However, refusing as he does to admit that he is something of a fantasist, Robbe-Grillet finds it difficult to justify (as if it needs justification) the

inclusion of a certain element of mystery in his works and claims preposterously that he doesn't even like mysteries – it is clear though from his fiction that he does and that he enjoys problems, the construction of puzzles, and laying false leads in a game of literary Cluedo; maybe he should have said that he doesn't like solutions, for the mystery, the strangeness that is to be found in, say, *Jealousy* or *In the Labyrinth* is not a specific puzzle which can be resolved by the fruitless and, I guess, impossible task of reconstructing, or creating a 'real' linear chronology. Similarly there is to be found in shabby, hard-bitten and honourable Philip Marlowe's highly subjective chronicles of murder and blackmail in his stylized LA a like density – one soon learns that these elaborately structured novels are virtually impossible to follow and simply reads on without understanding, or rather one understands for the moment, but as soon as the page is turned and is immediately contradicted it becomes evident that one is a victim of an ingenious hoax and a witness to something analogous to, but quite divorced from, real life. Hoaxes abound in *Jealousy*; there is, for instance, between the title page and the first chapter a plan of the narrator's bungalow, the veracity of which is variously called into question, denied and substantiated.

Let's wheel out from the wings White Russian writer Vladimir Nabokov, 72, with the 'beautiful idea' which he put into the mind of the unfortunate hero of *Laughter in the Dark*: 'It had to do with coloured animated drawings . . . How fascinating it would be if one could use this method for having some well known picture perfectly reproduced on the screen . . . and then brought to life – movement and gesture graphically developed in complete harmony with their static state in the picture, say, a pot-house with little people drinking lustily at wooden tables and a sunny glimpse of a courtyard with saddled horses – all suddenly coming to life with that little man in red putting down his tankard, this girl with the tray wrenching herself free, and a hen beginning to peck on the threshold.' An uncanny prediction by the author of sex-shocker Lolita, 12; for thus proceeded Robbe-Grillet in *Last Year in Marienbad* and *In the Labyrinth*.

A narrator, who mentions himself only at the beginning

and end of his book, sits in a room high above a city. All that he can see from its window is the house opposite, lamp-posts at regular intervals and an intersection of the street in which his room is situated with another, of identical houses, paving stones, lamp-posts, etc. In his room there hangs a print, *The Defeat at Reichenfels*, depicting a café scene which includes three, presumably vanquished, soldiers. From his window he glimpses a soldier standing beneath a lamp-post in the snow-covered street, clutching a parcel. A child in the picture is also holding a parcel. Gradually a novel begins to form itself in the author's mind, born from the elements present in his strictly limited surroundings. The picture comes to life, so to speak, the soldier becomes a sort of double of the author and they find themselves in the same maze – the soldier, attempting to deliver his parcel to an unknown person at an unknown destination, aided, hindered, and delayed by a child, who sometimes carries his parcel, a hostile and crippled man, and a woman whose dead or missing husband he resembles, proceeds along his tortuous way to death at the end of the book just as the author encounters impasses, doubles back on himself and sometimes returns to the picture on the wall in an attempt to find more food for speculation.

Falsely and immodestly Robbe-Grillet makes the same claim for *In the Labyrinth* as he does for Kafka's novels – that it has no allegorical significance. To state that *In the Labyrinth* is allegorical isn't to suggest that it's some sort of veiled tract on the quest for grace, God, grail or some other great unknown, but simply to point out that a completely self-sufficient book is impossible to make, that a work which sets out to do that becomes, as it does in this case, allegorical of the process of writing such a book. *In the Labyrinth* is not Kafkaesque; whereas the Czech set out to make us believe that K really was banging his head against a brick wall, Robbe-Grillet is content to convince no one, preferring to give us his unknown soldier (I've granted him semi-mythical stature) as nothing more or less than a figment of his imagination. Of course, every character in every other novel ever written, including those bastard books, fictionalized non-novels, non-fiction novels, documentary . . . etc, is a figment of an author's

imagination, but very few of them, authors or characters, admit it as they proceed across the page. However, the imagination of which *In the Labyrinth* is a product is not quite as unsullied as at first it might appear; without prior knowledge of the outside world, of course, it could not have come into being. Furthermore, the consistently ritualistic tone implies a kind of universality, a legend perhaps (which need not necessarily be allegorical) that the narrator has known and forgotten and is trying to recall. It is certainly, in its bizarre and original way, a rather romantic novel, and not the least considerable achievement of Robbe-Grillet in writing it was to convey with some degree of authenticity a feeling of *déjà vu*, one of the oddest of all experiences.

When it was released just under 10 years ago *Last Year in Marienbad* became obligatory material for analysis in almost every magazine devoted to art films. Perhaps its most surprising feature is that it appears in the light of Robbe-Grillet's subsequent films to have stronger affinities with his novels than do those which he has directed himself, which is to say that it is a lot better film than his own rather slight attempts at cinema. Like *In the Labyrinth*, it is intensely ritualistic: the tone is set at the beginning as the camera tracks along the corridors of the huge and baroque hotel(s) in which the action unfolds and a highly theatrical voice (French with an Italian accent) speaks what is almost an incantation before we arrive at a stage where a play is being acted in a very histrionic style and, surprise, we discover that the words we have heard are those of the actor. The 'narrator' of the movie then weaves out of the play and his desire or love for Delphine Seyrig, an elaborate *fantasie à trois*, featuring also toothy, tight lipped Sacha Pitoeff as her husband? Protector? Father? Had the director Alain Resnais followed the script more closely the relationship of Seyrig and Pitoeff would have been less ambiguous – for in the published text Robbe-Grillet describes the character Pitoeff played as being aged about 50 with greying hair, and thus sister incest would again have raised her twin and ugly heads. This protector figure recurs in *L'Immortelle*, the first (and best) film that Robbe-Grillet directed himself, but in a more sinister guise, as a fat and

elderly pimp who is constantly flanked by two gleaming, vicious and enormous dogs.

As if a substitute was required to compensate for the cinema's inability to render a subjective vision perfectly straightforwardly, for the camera's failure to transform objects as does prose, Robbe-Grillet has filled his films with tourist poster and bar story colour. So the Istanbul of *L'Immortelle* is, despite the fact that the film was executed in that city, a sort of mythic place, similarly the Amsterdam of *Trans Europe Express* and the North Africa of *Eden and After*. Robbe-Grillet doesn't, though, use the mosques, the canals, or the Berber villages to any dramatic end as, say, Hitchcock uses a Dutch windmill, the Albert Hall or Mt Rushmore. Rather these films are the product of an imagination fired by rumours of drug smuggling in Holland or the mysterious women who inhabit the East, and as such are not unlike Kafka's *Amerika* or Raymond Roussel's *Impressions of Africa* (a big favourite of Robbe-Grillet's). But the modern cinema abhors the studio and Robbe-Grillet's films somehow misfire because of the authenticity of these backgrounds; he would have done well to learn from film makers like Von Sternberg, whose *Shanghai Express* and *Morocco* are set in wildly artificial lands created out of plaster and cardboard – *Marienbad* with its extravagant interiors and formal gardens has all the appearances of being set on a stage, and so the theatricality and 'unreality' and almost grand guignol atmosphere are enhanced rather than rendered incongruous and false (in a pejorative sense).

Set in Hong Kong, the world of the *House of Assignation* (the politely euphemistic *La Maison de Rendezvous* is a far better title) is not far from that of Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu stories – countless pulp thrillers are revisited, parodied and transformed. Less formal than his previous novels (it was written after he seemed to have severed his connection with books in favour of cinema), it is overtly erotic and sensationalist. Opium dealers, procuresses, Eurasian nymphs, communist agents, large black dogs, the white slave trade . . . all are featured here; but the pseudo-geometric language is gone and the descriptions are more overtly poetic. One is not forced to identify with any of the characters, rather the reader is like a

spectator of kaleidoscopic lantern slides witnessing someone's erotic, vicious and frequently funny fantasies of the sexual demi-monde of the East. The style is perfect – urbane, self-effacing and mellifluous: 'A simple four poster bed, a length of cord, the smouldering end of a cigar – such images accompany me wherever I go, for hours, sometimes for days on end. In gardens I organise entertainments. In temples I arrange ceremonies and order sacrifices. Arab or Mogul palaces fill my ears with cries and sighs. In the bilateral symmetry of a Byzantine church I see dissected vaginas gaping wide. Two rings embedded in stone in the depths of an ancient Roman prison are enough to evoke the figure of the beautiful slavegirl in chains who is intended for long and lingering tortures in secrecy and solitude.'

These exquisitely wrought and sensual pages (which demonstrate that parody need not be anti-romantic) are populated by a variety of shadowy figures: Ralph Johnson alias Jonstone alias the American alias Sir Ralph, Lauren, a prostitute, nicknamed Loraine or Loraine B . . ., and Lady Ava, known as Eva Bergmann and Eve, who in the mysterious Villa Bleue organizes entertainments with titles like 'Ritual Murders' and 'The Bait'. This villa, the house of the title, decorated in a variety of sumptuous styles, Chinoise, Jazz Modern, Trompe L'Oeil, is the point to which the author's focus returns again and again as he tries to form his story from these admittedly clichéd elements which never cease to assail his imagination. The tableaux vivants, the grotesque statues in the gardens and real life all double for one another in this tale of murder, revenge, blackmail . . . Drawn as it is from – ghastly phrase – modern myth, the subject matter of *The House of Assignation* and of *Project for a Revolution in New York*, his latest novel, invites comparison with that of Warhol; but the mind at work beneath Robbe-Grillet's thick black hair is very different from that which functions beneath the blonde toupee and they possess no stylistic affinities. If comparisons between literature and painting are apt, which I doubt, the artist whose method would appear to be closest to that of Robbe-Grillet is the Dutchman M C Escher, who creates extravagantly impossible objects.

Seekers after universal significance, relevance, etc, can no doubt find it to a greater extent in Robbe-Grillet's two most recent novels than in his previous works. Real truth, what really happened, the indisputable facts of the case are shown to be just as liable to change as they are in the news media which ludicrously purport to report objectively. And lovers of messages and meanings can find consolation here and in *Jealousy* by discovering that man believes what he wants to believe . . . and so on. But to accuse Robbe-Grillet of being a didactic, or indeed a conceptual, artist is greatly to deprecate him.

Though he makes great use of those elements that Borges has defined as being the basics of fantastic literature – the double, the work within the work, the journey in time and the contamination of reality by dream – he is not exclusively a fantasist, for he recognizes that art, as well as being a game and a supreme entertainment, is also concerned with the creation of truths which may have some bearing on our lives and with the imposition of new patterns on the world; if to this end he has replaced one set of conventions with another equally strict and has taken to mimicking himself (his latest film *Eden and After* looks like the bastard offspring of Cola Advert and Skin Flick), he has produced two notable films, has had a big influence on a wide variety of writers (Vidal, Fowles, Wittig, Brooke-Rose and the cartoonist Guido Crepax), and most important has written fictions which have nothing to do with social realism or 'ideas' (best left to TV and journalism) but stand as independent edifices signifying nothing other than a highly original mind working with relish.

1971

Alain Robbe-Grillet (2): In Istanbul

Film scripts are similar to an artist's working drawings or a novelist's notes – hints at, arrows pointing towards the completed work. A scenario, since it is unlikely to be filmed more than once, thus differs from a playscript or a libretto which may go on being performed and reinterpreted for centuries. No doubt the publication of such blue-prints is intended to cast light on – mystery of mysteries – the 'creative process', to show maybe how the film evolved from that first spark in the author's mind, through the long hours in a leaky garret or the well heated script department, to its final form and first showing when, incidentally, starlet Cherie Glasse upstaged everybody by being attacked by her ocelot. Knowing as ever, Alain Robbe-Grillet writes in his preliminary note that this cine-novel (his euphemism, not mine) 'makes no claim to be a self contained work. The work is the film, as seen and heard in the cinema. What follows is merely a description . . .'

He's quite right. He's also – and anybody who has read his critical essays will have noted this – a past-master at self-justification and he goes on to add in a slightly apologetic tone, 'what is communicated is a wholly mental experience, whereas the work itself is intended to be a primarily sensual experience, and this aspect of it can never really be replaced.' However much I might decry the culture industry's ghastly penchant for self-exposure – meaningful artists in mackintoshes lurking outside, not schools, but, oh far more damaging, academies where apparently intelligent youths wait on their every word and take in whatever they say about their private obsessions being made public – I can't deny the fact of its existence and so have to bear with it. Just one more tilt: I'll opine that authors, publishers etc, ought to show a bit more

self-control, or, to put it another way, they should act altogether more artfully. Enough said.

Robbe-Grillet, of course, is anything but artless; he's a supreme artificer and *The Immortal One* is certainly the best film he's made – I'm not including that masterly milestone of modern cinema *Last Year at Marienbad* which he wrote, for it bears very strongly the signature of director Alain Resnais. Robbe-Grillet was accused of taking advantage of the enormous success of *Marienbad* when his film appeared in '63; hardly surprising there are thematic parallels between the two, but – and such a view is reinforced on reading the script – *The Immortal One* appears to resemble a series of reflections in still pools while *Marienbad*, you guessed it, flows smoothly on and on, round and round, its sources being its delta. *The Immortal One* is a sort of love and intrigue story set in and very much about Istanbul, 'contaminated in the popular imagination by a mixture of Pierre Loti, the Blue Guide and The Thousand and One Nights . . .', and it's also the city where the author met his wife – but that's neither here nor there. A young Frenchman meets and falls for a beautiful and mysterious girl who has a singularly unpleasant looking husband or pimp who goes everywhere in the company of two large and savage dogs. The lovers' assignations are spied on or thwarted and eventually they both 'die' in identical car crashes . . .

Such a résumé is, I guess, rather pointless, especially when one considers that, as is usual with Robbe-Grillet, elements of the story contradict each other and the real, the imagined, the dreamed and the construed are indistinguishable; anyone who reads the script without having seen the film will find themselves well lost – there's nothing particularly poetic about these descriptions which were originally intended for technicians and the reader is certainly not manipulated in the way he/she is when reading Robbe-Grillet's fiction. I think that his inability to realize his manipulative gifts in a purely cinematic way is the main reason for the comparative failure of his films. *Marienbad* was a great film for, among other reasons, the way in which an imagined world was depicted and made believable (which has nothing to do with representing 'real' life) through a definition of its limits. Robbe-Grillet's shortcomings are as

director, not as screenwriter; unlike Alain Resnais he wasn't born with a sure instinct for the cut of the celluloid, a gift for cinematic 'legibility', and he has, in venturing into the actual making of films, rather overreached himself. No matter, he's still one of the best living novelists.

This scenario contains 40 stills from the film. Nice views of Istanbul, the Bosphorus, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze who played the man and beautiful Françoise Brion, the girl of the title, who appears in a variety of poses which demonstrate her to good advantage; especially notable are those which depict the chained death the man imagines she will meet and another in which she lies spreadeagled and half undressed on a fur covered sofa – look at the line of her leg, her dark eyes, the ambiguous gesture of her right hand, the black tops of her stockings. Such sights bring the film bouncing back in front of my eyes . . .

The Immortal One by Alain Robbe-Grillet

1972

Alain Robbe-Grillet (3): New York

In English, 'clever' generally carries somewhat pejorative connotations: one is led to recall clever-dicks (the ones which make arses smart), smart-alecks (alicks? It's greasier, closer to the snout and Tru-Gel tenor of the truly wide boy), or if you're of an arty bent to think of the flashy glibness of punsters and wits, or glossily superficial, minutely representational illustrators (those who lack 'depth' and 'feeling', who don't get to the 'heart' of, right inside their subjects). Clever is the most apt, most curt and least pretentious adjective that can serve to describe Robbe-Grillet's novels. The publisher's blurb writer has attempted to make Robbe-Grillet 'relevant', asserting that 'New York's reality has caught up with his fictional prophecy'. In fact it's hard to imagine a writer who manifests a greater lack of interest in sociological or anthropological analyses – it simply doesn't occur to him to look at things through the eyes of the social scientist. So far as he is concerned the novelist's approach is just that, and not a psychologist's, communist's, liberal's, semiologist's or whatever; whether or not he admits it – and he seems loath to do so, at least in so many words – the only doctrine to which he conforms is that of art for art's sake; and that should lead no one to consider him trivial or 'unimportant'.

The title of this, his most recent novel (first published just over two years ago and translated by Richard Howard, the least mandarin of his English translators), is misleading in the most disingenuous way. Protest kids will be gulled into dipping into it; imagine their disappointment at discovering therein fine writing, fine wit, total lack of 'commitment' and not a single word of advice on how to make time bombs from Times Square parking meters – do such technological treasures exist

there? (A reliable and garrulous source informs me that the timing mechanisms of Kilburn parking meters are cropping up with great frequency in home-made Irish bombs.) Of course it's not only those who are fooled by the title who will be taken in; as usual Robbe-Grillet is determined to tease, titillate, dupe and *disappoint* his readers. His conception of New York (not so different from that of Hong Kong in *The House of Assignation*, to which he alludes a few times) owes more to his (mis)reading of lurid accounts of that city's demi-monde in *France Soir*, *Ici Paris* and dime (sou) novels than to any 'authentic', first-hand experience of it. Virtually every cliché relating to the violence of the city and the sexual tastes of its inhabitants is set down here – muggings, rapes, sado-sexual experiments, the dangers of riding the subway, the prowlers who lurk in apartment blocks and so on. Out of such hackneyed and threadbare material Robbe-Grillet or 'the narrator' tries, using a variety of means which despite their appearance are not cinematic, to construct a coherent 'story', to find a structure in which all his chosen and 'cardboard' characters and situations are integrated. This is the subject, the main preoccupation of the novel. Eschewing all established disciplines, Robbe-Grillet sets out to form one of his own and to demonstrate that the only pattern which can be imposed on the data with which he feeds himself and which constantly alters beneath his gaze is one that is self-contradictory and convoluted to the point where it makes no 'sense' save on a near hallucinatory level. And while it's only too clear that he enjoys puzzles, trompe l'oeil jokes, exercises and games it would be both insolent and ludicrous to suggest that the diligent reader might decipher the text and reach a solution, discover a 'correct' order in which the scenes might be played or presented. Still his claims to be a 'realist' are not altogether without foundation; the most evidently effective external realism is that which is constructed along the lines of some kind of factual report, the news broadcast (like Welles's Mars scare) or an obituary, a biography, a journalistic account etc. Likewise Robbe-Grillet's fictions tend to mimic the obsessional ramblings of some schizophrenics – they are documentaries of fantasies and, as such, completely realistic; they pretend to be

nothing more than what they are. Like many modern painters (Lowell Nesbitt, Wesselmann, Warhol) Robbe-Grillet relies on distortion achieved through deadpan precision rather than through juxtaposition, 'inaccurate' rendering, or the introduction of the recognizably fantastic. It appears that his ideas on the relationship of objects represented to their models are a lot closer to those of these contemporary visual artists than to those of the French novelists with whom he is generally categorized in the many tiresome tracts on the 'new novel' – whatever that is.

There is, incidentally, an obvious bond between him and Allen Jones, who frequently draws on what art critics term, for some reason known only to themselves, 'fetishist' material – long black suspenders extended over white and milky flesh, the same flesh which is to be glimpsed at the highest extremity of a slit in a black, shiny and tight skirt which further reveals a roseate garter bearing a satin violet; innocent and wanton preteen cherubs who, against their wills no doubt, are degraded and tarnished by pallid rakes; amazonian, disciplinarian hookers whose dead straight seams end in devastatingly pointed and overtly threatening stilettos; blouses in stiff, glistening materials (lurex, taffeta) which are strained by, yes, willing, firm, generous breasts, and yet more: transformation and ambivalence, the strangler's silent kerchief, the rod which is never spared, the incision which emits a regular flow of carmine fluid. I only draw attention to these features common to both artists' work in order to suggest that the publishers might have done better to commission a cover from Jones rather than affront the (potential) reader with a tawdry design executed with the aid of type. Calder & Boyars, who hold the English rights to many of the greatest works of modern fiction, do themselves a huge disservice by consistently presenting their products in jackets which look like the work of earnest art students of the late fifties.

In the above worlds role playing looms large and masks are an important prop. The three page description of the window display of a mask shop stands out as one of the most marvellous and, curiously, most poetic pieces of writing I've ever encountered; Robbe-Grillet walks a tight rope, omitting no

nuance, never failing to digress, yet never straying far enough from the object of his (and our) attention to hamper the movement of the passage. Equally remarkable are his depictions of minds in a state of acute and frenzied panic. I can think of no other writer who can render the banal so fearfully fantastic. In the subtlest, slyest and most sheerly delightful way he persuades us to look anew at the commonplace and to realize that everything we see, feel and think is phenomenal, and to consider that the word 'ordinary' could well be discredited. He thus celebrates man and his ability to conquer natural laws far more thoroughly than do 'concerned' and sentimental humanist writers.

Project for a Revolution in New York by Alain Robbe-Grillet (trans. Richard Howard)

1973

Cleverness

'It takes a clever dick to make an arse smart.' Now, there's a sentence fit for drubbing, one that compounds qualities that the English regard as failings: too clever by half; flash; gaugedly obscene. Best then surely to pretend that I'd never thought of it, to keep stumm or at least to excuse myself on the grounds of greenness and youth – I did after all write it fifteen years ago. And my sin is the graver for having made it graphic – you can, can you not, picture the phallus or its simulacrum (a studded fascinum or emery dildo); you can certainly hear the cry as it gatecrashes the party, and here are the teeth marks on the bolster. I guess that it doesn't do in Britain to be clever, it probably never did. Jesuitry, casuistry, sophistry – these are not British modes: when a politician in these islands is accused of one or other it merely means that he's lying but that no one dares say so. Actually the very notion of a clever politician is an oxymoron, at least of a clever politician who is a success: cleverness is something to be dissembled, and dissemblance leads eventually to the bereavement of whatever it is that is being masked. There is no mystery about the root of the British antipathy – it is born out of the worship of commonsense, the base material pragmatism that makes this country run the way it does (drably, greedily, functionally). Commonsense is a millstone which can magically mutate into a wet blanket, into a knuckle-rapping ruler – well, it could if it could do anything magically, which it can't. Commonsense is a dogged, plodding protestant quality; it is both the enemy of cleverness and the covert bond between Britons of otherwise opposing temperaments and ideologies. It occupies the position of primacy in British (public) life, it cruises down the middle of the mainstream consigning all else

to the tributaries and backwaters. Much of what is thus consigned we must be thankful for – commonsense has militated against the widespread acceptance in these islands of any of the nastier isms and against the rise of the one party state – so far. On the other hand it is impossible to escape the fact that Britain is the least liberal country in western Europe, the most over-governed and perhaps the only one that dreams of being a cultural desert. It tends to be the clever who mess up that dream. The problem with cleverness is that it's not much use in business or trade, in politics or the diplomatic service, the forces etc. A clever businessman is a euphemism for a businessman who has greater reserves of low cunning than the majority. Read this businessman's recipe for success, read the memoirs of that diplomat (let's call him Henderson), and you'll very likely find yourself in the company of a hackneyed mind that expresses itself through a salad of infelicities and syntactical balls-ups – the tone is likely to be that of rotarian jocularity or officers' mess joshing, or it'll be contaminated by the jargon of the self-improver. The impression you'll most certainly not get is one of cleverness. No-nonsense, cut-out-the-frills, straight-from-the-hip – yes. Clever – no. The clever long ago retreated from positions of authority and executive influence in this country; retreated is perhaps not strictly apt since they weren't invited. They went off, till a generation or two ago, to academe, to the church, to teaching; they still go to academe, rarely to the church or teaching, increasingly to telly, journalism, 'communications'. Indeed the burgeoning of these peripheral fields of endeavour is at least partly attributable to the clever building branches for themselves to perch on, whence they can shit on the great armies of the no-nonsense passing beneath. Small wonder that the no-nonsense hit back.

Small wonder that the current government has consistently sought to undermine academe, the press and the broadcasting media. Unclever as it is (stand up Messrs Fowler, Newton, Hurd etc) it has had the nous to realize that the *status quo* in this country over the past quarter or more of a century has incorporated an eternal *trahison des clercs*: anti-establishmentism has been the characteristic pose of the clever, a situation tolerated

for much of that period by administrations that besides lacking the corner-shop zeal of this one were partially composed of apostates to cleverness. Now, one can be pretty certain that so long as Mr Terry Dicks does not fluke it into the cabinet the example of Pol Pot will go unfollowed, spectacle-wearers will not be exterminated on the grounds that they are liable to be intellectual and thus opponents of the government. But the bastions of cleverness will go on being attacked: broadcasting will be forced into increasing competitiveness and so become increasingly lowbrow; academe will be forced into supplying production-line 'vocational' courses to the exclusion of the humanities and non-utile sciences. The entire apparatus that nurtured cleverness will, one dull day, be found to have been dismantled. The process of attrition-through-privatization is of course well under way. Refugees from the apparatus are already to be seen submitting to the politicization of cleverness by denying their cleverness, by mastectomizing the breast that fed them – and they effect their espousal of commonsense with the slippery sleight of mind that is an eternal and amoral characteristic of the clever. It is this base talent for wearing a new cap that will prevent there occurring a diaspora of the clever – after all, where could they go? The States welcomes only top of the bill dissidents; and in Europe, well, they might just find out that they'll be found out. Like, oh, art and delicious food and articulate conversation cleverness is an everyday item there, not a luxury good to be preciously locked away and unsullied by its application to the everyday. The notions of the clever dick and smart arse are ones that Europe doesn't suffer. It probably has something to do with republicanism, and with Rome in the marrow.

1988

Ils bagoulent comme ça, ces salauds: French Slang

The only way to learn a language is to sleep with a dictionary – jocular stuff from men in Mandalay and Jaipur and Cairo, stuff from the Warrant Officers' Mess, stuff to give the rookies. Of course it's no more invariably true than *Smile and the world smiles with you, snore and you sleep alone*; I mean, some of the best dictionaries make extraordinary nocturnal noises (oneiric responses, no doubt, to the bit of sack they've just had). No, the trouble is that while you may pick up a crock of endearments and a few words for your genitals and for – depending on taste – cunnilingus or rimming (or both) you will be unlikely, unless fate or design takes you into the bed of a lexicographer, to do as well for slang as for standard language. The fact is our slang vocabularies are limited by place, job, the crowd we run with and so on; they are prone to quick changes; I doubt that many of us can remember accurately the gamut of slang words we used ten or fifteen years ago; I guess that to learn a lot of slang you need to sleep with a lot of dictionaries, each from a different milieu. Catch phrases like those at the top of this paragraph are different, liable to transcend place and generation because, I guess, they are vaguely apothegmatic, little gobs of savvy, the sort of worldly nous that perpetually illumines taprooms and NAAFIs and the lads' corner in rude discos. Slang, though, is essentially synonymic; its habitual referents are always with us, always being granted new signifiers that tend to obviate the old ones. Here's a referent: the thin cylinder of paper bung full of tobacco that does us no good save as a solace and a sensory pleasure. The one just now extinguishing itself in the ashtray beside this typewriter is, unusually and aptly, of nicotine brown paper. I only rarely smoke Gitanes Maïs now. I used to smoke them a

lot. M. Ponty's marvellous packet design is now marred by an officious legend ('Abus Dangereux – Loi Du 9 Juillet 1976'), otherwise this product is still pretty much what it was when I smoked it in Bordeaux in the late 60s. The word I used then for a Gitane Maïs, or indeed a white Gitane or Royale or Krraven Ah was *une tige*. Now, this admirable brick of lex (877 pages, '50,000 modern words and expressions from the colloquial to the very vulgar') has no etymologies and omits the word from its handy list of synonyms for cigarette. Look the other way though, i.e. look under *tige* and you'll find that it means old chap, a pilot who got his licence before 1914, shoe, boot and, with the definite article masculine, policeman; also, deriving you might reckon from *tige de paquerette* which is an archaic term for thin legs or matchsticks, it is listed as a word for cigarette. OK, but not OK for long; the entry ends with the parenthetical exhortation 'Voir *brouter 2*'. Back in the middle of the brick of lex we learn that *brouter la tige* is translatable as, say, *hundred to eight* which, you must know, is rhyming slang for *plate* which used to be a popular word for fellatio; (Jenny Fabian's novel of the psychedelic underground 'Groupie' (1969) has more plates than Wedgwood though the only person who uses *plate* now is the masculist militant Jeffrey Bernard). Thus *tige* meaning cigarette comes from *tige* meaning penis? After all they are homomorphic if, save in a few particularly unfortunate cases, of different sizes. I don't know; *tige*, in either of these senses, appears nowhere else among the 50,000 modern words. It is not even included among the 88 synonyms for penis which include such beauts as *cyclope* (which is a relation of Barry Mackenzie's *one eyed trouser snake*), *baïonnette* (cf *beef bayonet, mutton dagger, pork sword* – all which are omitted from the list of English words), *andouille à col roulé* (i.e. a tripe and chitterling sausage with its black skin rolled back) and *bite*. (Nabokov wrote to Edmund Wilson that Genet was only any good when he had 'the *bite* between the teeth'). The sedulous reviewer would at this point stir the dictionary from whom he learnt the word. But I can't; I can't wake her because she died thirteen years ago in a silly accident in a silly looking Panhard in an underpass beside the Garonne. So one of the many things that'll forever go unlearnt is

whether she knew it meant anything other than cigarette. Also: where did *she* get the word? From her strivingly smooth ex, Hervé, whose father was a printer at the paper *Sud Ouest*? (Assume that French printers have their own argot like English ones.) From one of the noisome bars on Quai de la Monnaie where students used to slum with Spanish Basque 'guestworkers' known, invariably, as *vaches Espagnoles*? (In this Bordelais construction *vache* does not signify, as it usually does, *bastard* or *real cunt* or *swine*; rather it means an *oaf*, blessed with a facilely outwittable low cunning.) From the pages of Queneau or Boris Vian? (The invented slang of fiction soon enters the vocabularies of the few people who still read the stuff and is thence spread about to happy illiterates – London is full of non-readers of Amis *fils*, whinnying girls in their early twenties, who refer to their wilder friends as *tonto*; long before Kubrick gave us his version of 'A Clockwork Orange' there were art school boys and girls rapping in Nadsat; I have a group of friends who refer to themselves as *morries* – smart, on the make, not strictly legit – and to their earnest, caring 'n' concerned coevals as *slag*. This from Robin Cook's 'The Crust on its Uppers').

Eric Partridge and his successor Paul Beale relied on, rely on correspondents of varying degrees of accuracy as well as on the printed word. Jonathon Green reads an awful lot and is, I suspect, wary of words unsanctioned by publication and televisual repetition or by his habitual informant Andrew Payne, who is one of the writers of 'Minder'. Jane Pratt's method is not readily divined. In her preface she names 17 persons 'who, in many different ways, gave advice and assistance', eight or nine of them native anglophones, to judge from their names; among the French is one Jef Tombeur who sounds like a cypher in one of J. P. Melville's austere thrillers and whose chosen surname means womanizer. They all know their stuff. There are few howlers (to do it doggy fashion does not mean to sodomize) and only a few by omission or inclusion; if you are going to put in unslangy archaisms like *toodle-oo* you should translate it not as *au revoir* or *ciao* but as *à tout à l'heure* of which it is an anglo rendering. (Partridge goes wildly wrong here and claims it derives from the sound of an

early motor horn.) Mostly though Pratt's mob have got it right. It's a pity that having gathered such a formidable glossary she didn't qualify entries with sources, but you can't have everything – especially not time, money and paper from publishers. This book comes from Harrap's Educational Department; it has taught me that in the anglophone world we fuck as much as in the francophone, that England and the USA have a bigger drug usage than France, and are more prone to homophobia. These anyway are the sorts of thing you conclude if you measure quantitatively, according to how many signifiers each is granted here; you will also conclude that the mutual antipathy of the French and the English is about equal. It is extraordinary that *capote Anglaise* should mean *French letter* and that *to take French leave* is *filer à l'anglaise*; it is less extraordinary that the English should call fellatio *French* while the French should call lunar blood *les anglais*. What I mean is that oral intercourse used to be regarded in these islands with the same distaste as periods often are still. (I remember reading, God knows where, an account of a British Tommy who was plated by a French girl asking his post-war wife to do the same and getting a bollocking for his degrading cheek, being told it was not a thing to even mention in front of a decent woman.) What else? Well, I've learnt that if your surname is Pratt and you happen to be editor of a dictionary of slang you make sure that the entry for *prat* is spelled thus, without the terminal 't'.

Harrap's Slang Dictionary English–French/French–English by Georgette A. Marks and Charles B. Johnson, revised and edited by Jane Pratt

1984

Tournier's Twins

Twins are, *ab ovo*, different from the rest of us. Mere singletons (as paediatricians – are they bridge players? – insist on calling us) are innocent of the phenomenon that twins, whether or not they have shared the same placenta, consider natural – imagine having a duplicate and a breathing mirror to yourself, imagine sharing as a norm, imagine that mirror as a companion who is ever there. Michel Tournier's protagonist is a pair of twins, born in 1930 to a well-off family in rural Brittany and known as Jean-Paul; maybe I should say that his protagonist is Paul and his deuteragonist Jean – the notions of unity and separability are among the book's fundaments. Twins of course lend credibility to the overdone device of the doppelganger; mercifully, typically, M. Tournier is not much interested in formulaic fantastic literature, or rather he is not much interested in making it; he knows the pratfalls so well that he is sometimes to be found taking circuitous avoiding action. He need not have worried; his mentation and invention and imagination are sheerly wonderful. No other writer, now that Nabokov is dead, displays his fastidiousness, visual acuity and sublime waywardness – like Nabokov he takes nothing for granted, marvels at the physical world, has nothing but contempt for utilitarianism and materialism, despises 'sound common sense'. Nabokov wrote an airy, black story called 'Scenes from the Life of a Double Monster' about a conjoined pair, Lloyd and Floyd, sad epigoni of Chang and Eng. Monster: M. Tournier reminds those defective in Latin and Romance languages that monster is derived from *monstrare* – thus we may accurately call protest marchers monsters; a monster's lot is to be put on show or to display himself. Monsters of the deep is oxymoronic.

These twins are monsters. So was Abel Tiffauges, the titular Erl King of M. Tournier's last novel (Prix Goncourt, thoroughly justified); Tiffauges has a walk-on role here, unannounced and anonymous, but it's him all right. One cannot complain that the author is indulging himself by exhuming his past creation because he fits in so neatly and is very horrible indeed. The twins and their vain feckless father meet him at his garage and again at a funfair (Luna Parc, I guess, which used to stand near the Porte de Neuilly and was full of teratological attractions, both real and simulated). Tiffauges takes one of the twins on to the Rotor, what is called in this country, I think, the Wall of Death, centrifugally balanced human flies inside a whizzing drum. M. Tournier's description of this is spellbinding.

No less a monster than Tiffauges and the twins is their uncle Alexandre. He is homosexual, dandiacal, and a garbage king. He has inherited from his elder brother a company called TURDCO (it is clever of Anne Carter, whose translation is unexceptionable, to have devised a company that gives such an acronym – The Urban Refuse Disposal Company). Alexandre's first-person narrative is intercut with those of Paul (the most 'prolific' of the several authors), Jean, a number of minor characters and the 'author'. They all write in the same style; there is no attempt at 'characterization' and all the characters know themselves well – dramatic irony is not one of M. Tournier's ploys. All of them, furthermore, like their begetter, are polymaths. All of them go in for – ungainly term – special pleading. Thus Paul believes that twinship is the state to which all other relationships aspire, the state to which all humankind wishes to return. Return? Yes, he suggests that non-twins strangled their twins in the womb and fed on them. Jean, contrarily, wants to escape the shadow that is his brother. Alexandre writes without the benefit of a twin's 'geminate intuition' but as a homoerotologist, perverse aesthete, devotee of really rough trade, student of working class mores, encomiast of rubbish. He is a most bizarre and beguiling creation. Paul and Alexandre and many of the other characters are prey to delusions for which there may be precedents in clinical psychiatry but which M. Tournier may well have

invented. He renders them credible, seductive. They are variously sidereal, meteorological, Christian, linguistic, chronal and so on; these elements are interwoven with staggering ingenuity. Various characters are – to be simple about it – prone to changes in temperament according to changes in the weather (the *météore* of the original French title is any atmospheric phenomenon, *not* a meteorite), they are corporeal barometers. It is further suggested, initially by a priest who was one of Alexandre's schoolfriends (or homosexual sodales), that the Christocentric church must give way to one which recognizes the primacy of the Holy Ghost. And the Holy Ghost which fell on the Apostles (Acts II,15) is present in the wind, in all meteors. This pentecostal delusion pervades the book, indeed prompts its transcendental climax; it involves the conviction that Jesus had a twin, Thomas, and that they became sacred meteors. Moreover it suggests that weather forecasting is an attack on the free will of the Holy Ghost.

The richness and strangeness of the private worlds (and private languages) that M. Tournier constructs and attributes to his characters is a matter for wonder. However, who gets what idea seems sometimes a bit arbitrary; you get the feeling that he has merely (!) flipped through his bulging fecund notebooks picking out conceits at random. But it is mean-spirited to complain that the dreary niceties of 'psychological realism' (which is nothing of the sort) are not adhered to and that consequently the characters are inconsistent. The sprightliness of the notions themselves and their lucid expression is enough.

It would be misleading to suggest that this prodigious and densely detailed construction is anything so jejune as a 'novel of ideas'. It is that, among many other things – family saga, adventure yarn, thriller, very black comedy, hymn to homosexual incest, picaresque novel. It contains some of the finest descriptive writing that I have ever come upon: the absolute congruity of M. Tournier's fervid oneiric imaginings and his (and his translator's) means of realizing them is splendid. Nothing here deserves the ghastly plaudit 'well observed', which implies that the observation is of some common, extant, already finite experience. What M. Tournier describes he first

has to invent – a horse bleeding to death in a pit of barbed wire, a vast rubbish tip ruled at night by rats and diurnally by gulls, a spaghetti-like mass of tapeworm expelling itself from a woman at a ball.

No doubt M. Tournier is too patently schematic, too often straining to achieve his mirror effects – the metaphor of Berlin's division for the split of the twins is perhaps a bit hard to take, but it is so dramatically done that you are initially swept along. No doubt much has been lost in translation: there is much business about a Roanne hotel called the Crane Drivers' Rest or the Cranes: *grue*, the French word for crane, also means whore (of either sex). No doubt M. Tournier's unrestructured semiological and anthropological preoccupations will cause him to be consigned to the preposterous laboratories of New Academe where solemn toilers will, quite rightly, 'place' him beside some of the many to whom in one way or another he nods (Octave Mirbeau, Huysmans, Loti, Raymond Roussel, Verne, etc.) while failing to recognize that he is, like all great artists, *sui generis* and an avatar of manifold disparate traditions, all of which blend harmoniously in him.

Gemini by Michel Tournier, trans. from *Les Météores* by Anne Carter

1981

Borges (1): The Whole World's There

It's interesting, but probably quite pointless, to wonder why Borges, ignored by the British public for so long, should suddenly have emerged as the most fashionable writer of the day. He has been widely read in Germany and France (notably by J-L Godard) since the publication there of his *Fictions* in the early 'fifties, and he gained a large following in the USA during the 'sixties. Now he's spoken of with adulatory and unquestioning reverence within the confines of these shores – thus do reputations soar. One commentator, a Mr Hudson, writing in the *Spectator*, suggests that because of the similarity of Borges's work to *The Lord of the Rings*(!) he was bound to find a place in the hearts and minds of fans of that whimsical saga; all that I can say about this – smugly and not altogether untruthfully – is that Mr Hudson just don't know what he's Tolkien about. As your chuckles subside I'll add, quite irrelevantly, that the pompous and ill-briefed professor who introduced Borges to the rapt audience at one of the series of lectures he delivered recently in London seemed perplexed that the frail, blind old man on the platform with him should possess such a startling number of devotees considering that his work deals with neither social nor political problems . . .

His best work is timeless, stylistically beautiful, clear and puzzling, theatrical, witty, scholarly, wise, too clever by half and enormously entertaining. His worst work is, sadly, his most recent. The stories on which his reputation rests are those written in a roughly 20-year period stretching from the middle 'thirties to the middle 'fifties – they include *The Garden of the Forking Paths, Death and the Compass, The Babylon Lottery, The Immortal, Funes the Memorious, Deutsches Requiem, The*

Library of Babel and lots more besides, all of a similarly fantastic and fabulous nature.

A native of Buenos Aires, he has lived there (with a seven year break during adolescence and early manhood in Switzerland and Spain) all his life, frequenting almost exclusively literary society, working in libraries and, until his debut as a story writer, contributing criticism and verse to a variety of small magazines, some of which he was involved with in an editorial capacity. So it is not perhaps surprising that he should have regarded the world as a sort of book and that certain pieces of his early imaginative prose should have been elaborately executed literary hoaxes.

Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote, is a short note on a recently deceased, and quite fictitious, French poet and essayist who set out to write, word for word and without reference to the original, the *Don Quixote* of Cervantes. Of course such an undertaking is clearly preposterous, but it doesn't seem so in Borges's straight-faced and very funny essay: 'Any insinuation that Menard dedicated his life to the writing of a contemporary *Don Quixote* is a calumny of his illustrious memory. He did not want to compose another *Don Quixote* – which would be so easy – but the *Don Quixote*.' Borges facetiously suggests that Menard's exercise had a meaning: 'Menard (perhaps without wishing to) has enriched, by means of a new technique, the hesitant and rudimentary art of reading: the technique is one of deliberate anachronism and erroneous attributions. This technique, with its infinite applications, urges us to run through the *Odyssey* as if it were written after the *Aeneid* . . . This technique would fill the dullest books with adventure. Would not the attributing of *The Imitation of Christ* to Louis Ferdinand Celine or James Joyce be a sufficient renovation of its tenuous spiritual counsels?' (Such a view is akin to that implied in his much quoted statement that 'every writer creates his own precursors'.)

Safe in the knowledge that this essay is fiction we can laugh along with the author and rejoice in his little leg-pull, aware that we're being fooled the same way every day, not by good-natured pranksters, but by slanted news reports telling the truth right from the crutch etc. Truth is in the eyes of he who

makes it up and the absence of absolutes delights Borges – anything is possible, probable even, in a world which can spring from one hat Homer and from another Hitler. No wonder, then, Borges's great and lasting interest in, but failure to embrace, religion. For acceptance of a creed is anathema to one whose greatest love is to speculate yet knows that on the horizon of the hypothesis no answer will be sighted. As Anthony Kerrigan, the best translator of Borges, writes in his introduction to *Fictions*: 'All our knowledge has led us exactly to this point, just where we started, endless years ago. We have only been playing a game, an immortal game, all along.' Hence those fictions which are ludibund, but totally serious, metaphors for this world; hence also the use of detective story techniques and the formal detective stories, two of which *The Garden of the Forking Paths*, and *Death and the Compass*, are classics of the genre – the third, *Ibn Hakkan al-Bokhari, Dead in his Labyrinth*, despite the beautiful title, is too parodic, too self conscious to succeed.

The Garden of the Forking Paths includes many of the elements of the English mystery story as written by Chesterton or lesser lights like M P Shiel and Thomas Burke – a perfidious, yet honourable and stoical oriental, a doctor of an obscure discipline (sinology), an English country house, and one Captain Richard Madden, who might have muscularly clambered straight from the pages of Sapper or Buchan. Borges's execution of the story is marvellous. A prefatory note suggests that Dr Yu Tsun's confession will give the reason for the postponement of a certain offensive during the 1st World War. To endow the story with the kind of 'reality' or believability that he is so keen on Borges notes that the said offensive is mentioned in Liddell Hart's *History of the World War*. Yu Tsun, a German spy, with his normal lines of communication severed, resolves to commit an otherwise unnecessary and, to him, quite repulsive murder in order to transmit certain information. During an interview with his victim immediately prior to the killing he learns the secret of *The Garden of the Forking Paths*, a labyrinthine novel written by one of his ancestors. Of course this work acts as an interior duplication of Yu Tsun's story; it guides him and even justifies his fell

deed, implying that the fates of victim and assassin are, in this life, simply to fulfil those roles and no others. Alternative lives would have found them as brothers, friends . . .

Death and the Compass is set in what Borges calls a nightmare version of Buenos Aires. It is available in England in three translations, here is the first sentence of each:

'Of the many problems which exercised the daring perspicacity of Lonnrot none was so strange – so harshly strange, we may say – as the staggered series of bloody acts which culminated at the villa of Triste-le-Roy, amid the boundless odour of the eucalypti.' (Anthony Kerrigan, *Fictions*.)

'Of the many problems which exercised the reckless discernment of Lonnrot, none was so strange – so rigorously strange shall we say – as the periodic series of bloody events which culminated at the villa of Triste-le-Roy, amid the ceaseless aroma of the eucalypti.' (Donald A Yates, *Labyrinths*.)

'Of the many problems that ever taxed Erik Lonnrot's rash mind, none was so strange – so methodically strange, let us say – as the intermittent series of murders which came to a culmination amid the incessant odour of eucalyptus trees at the villa of Triste-le-Roy.' (Norman Thomas di Giovanni and Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph*.)

I suppose we should accept the last version, after all Borges had more of a hand in it than in the others, but somehow this, together with most of the translations offered in *The Aleph* – his most recent volume to appear in England – seems to lose the hallucinatory realism of Anthony Kerrigan's work. Borges, rendering his stories into English over a quarter of a century after he had originally composed them, seems to have striven for and have achieved the kind of simplicity which is to be found in his recent work – he appears now to be content to be a teller of tales and nothing more, the artifice and the sharpness have departed. One has only to compare, say, 'the staggered series of bloody acts . . . the boundless odour of the eucalypti', with 'the intermittent series of murders . . . the incessant odour of eucalyptus trees' to appreciate that the concern for words, for the sound and for the look of the letters is missing.

Lonnrot, the tale's logical detective, a hearth-side Hebraist

familiar with the Tetragrammaton, the four letter, unspeakable name of God, concludes that three murders, committed on the third days of consecutive months at equidistant points, will be followed by a fourth; so on the third day of the fourth month he travels to Triste-le-Roy whose point on a map forms a square with those of the loci of the previous crimes only to discover that he is to die at the hands of Red Scharlach, alias (or as di Giovanni and Borges rather weakly have it – nicknamed) Scharlach the Dandy, his old foe, whose previous crimes (one of which was a sham) were perpetrated with the sole intention of drawing detective and victim to the solitary villa which abounds in 'superfluous symmetries and in maniacal repetitions.' So Lonnrot meets his death and every fantasist's friends the dancing duo Doppel and Ganger show themselves – as Borges points out, 'The killer and the slain, whose minds work in the same way, may be the same man. Lonnrot is, in a symbolic way, a man committing suicide. This is hinted at by the similarity of their names. The end syllable of Lonnrot means red in German, and Red Scharlach is also translatable, in German, as Red Scarlet.' The list of authors who have used doubles is long and distinguished, not the least notable among them is Edgar Poe.

It is from Poe – author of *William Wilson* and precursor of Stevenson and Chesterton, two other great influences on him – that Borges seems to have acquired the declamatory histrionic tone in which he writes so many of his fictions. Poe so begins *Eleonora*: 'I am come of a race noted for vigor of fancy and ardor of passion', and *William Wilson*: 'Let me call myself for the present William Wilson. The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation.' And Borges's *Babylon Lottery* commences: 'Like all men in Babylon I have been a proconsul; like all, a slave; I have also known omnipotence, opprobrium, jail. Look: the index finger of my right hand is missing. Look again: through the rent in my cape you can see a ruddy tattoo on my belly.' In a highly melodramatic twist at the end of *The Shape of the Sword* a man who has been telling a tale of a treacherous and cowardly informer reveals himself to be that informer: '"You don't believe me?" he stammered. "Don't you see that I carry on my face the mark of my infamy? I have told

you the story thus so that you would hear me to the end: I am Vincent Moon. Now despise me."'

In *The Library of Babel* the anonymous narrator writes: 'Like all men of the Library, I have travelled much in my youth. I have journeyed in search of a book, perhaps of the catalogue of catalogues . . .' The use of such a method suggests that the tale told belongs to folklore – not the quaint peasant on a bench variety – and to myth maybe; it implies that the tale is somehow unquestionable. Borges seems, in his invented, dreamed worlds to have created entities whose reality is far surer than that of the material world about us, of which each of his worlds is, ironically, a sort of model. So persuasive is his prose, so limpid are his descriptions of these imagined universes that the reader must stand in relation to them as Borges stands in relation to the world about him and those which he finds in books. These perfect miniatures become a source of wonder and awe while remaining, infuriatingly and delightfully, neither preposterous nor significant of anything in particular; yet they are not opaque, rather they appear as an infinite series of teasing reflections.

The element of quest in his stories has prompted a lot of commentators to compare Borges with Kafka. It seems difficult to find any major post-modernist writer who has not been compared with the Czech at one time or another, and in the case of Borges the comparison is inaccurate. Contrasted with Borges's puzzles and hypotheses *The Trial* and *The Castle* appear artless and plodding, metaphors for alienation, works which, even if one does not know the circumstances of Kafka's life, somehow bear witness to the tormented mind of their creator and give the impression of having been of some therapeutic value to him. Borges's stories do not lead anyone – I hope – into seeking keys of an autobiographical nature. (Though it must be conceded that his blindness does seem to have had a considerable influence on his work.) He is versatile, he prompts one to believe that he writes from behind a mask, and if the mask should on occasion resemble the death head of Franz Kafka we shouldn't take it too seriously, for likely as not next time round it'll be looking like the fluffy cast of hairy, beary Walt Whitman and contradicting everything he's just

propounded. It's impossible not to believe that the 'parable' *Everything and Nothing* which purports to be about Shakespeare is also about Borges: 'Behind his face and his words, which were copious, fantastic and stormy, there was only a bit of coldness, a dream dreamt by no one . . . the soul which inhabited him was Caesar, who disregards the augur's admonition, and Juliet, who abhors the lark, and Macbeth, who converses on the plain with the witches who are also the fates. No one has ever been so many men as this man, who like the Egyptian Proteus could exhaust all the guise of reality.'

Now imagine a shivery scene in which the silvery sheen of a mask is glimpsed in the shadows. The actor emerges into the light, removes the mask, and straight away it's apparent that it perfectly corresponded to the face it covered . . . the flashy trick of a showy wizard, who if he isn't Borges is almost certain to be Nabokov. For those who believe in the existence of a god the fact that they were born within a few months of each other in 1899 no doubt signifies something or other; for the rest of us it's a happy coincidence. (As Borges writes: 'Reality favours symmetries and anachronisms.') In an interview in 1966 Nabokov named Borges as one of his favourite writers. Borges on the other hand denies ever having heard of the sire of Lo and Ada: 'Nakobov, Vanobok, no, no, don't know of this person.' The similarities between them are legion. Lots of writers have, of course, employed doubles, interior duplications, mirrors etc as props or means to telling stories, but no two have so consistently made use of these fantastic devices as subject matter. (The guileful narrator of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* says that the heroes of one of his dead brother's books are the methods of composition, and it's hard to doubt that Nabokov shares this view with relation to his own novels.) They are, too, the most notable practitioners of the metaphysical detective story, a term which seems to no longer require inverted commas, having become over the last 20 or so years a genre quite common in European and American fiction. Nabokov has never written a straight detective novel, but *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, *Despair*, and most spectacularly, *Pale Fire* are, in different ways, structured like detective novels which feature the reader as the sleuth.

In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* a novelist's brother tries to discover, by means of interview with those who knew and loved him and through investigation of his books, the 'true' nature of the dead writer, whose work bears more than a passing resemblance to that of Herbert Quain, subject of Borges's hoax obituary *An Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain*. Both writers, Quain and Knight, delighted, as do their creators, in deceptive detective stories. In Knight's *The Prismatic Bezel* a man is murdered; another falls under suspicion only to reveal at the end of the book that he is the one who is believed to have been killed, and that he has been hanging around, disguised, throughout the methodical tec's lumbering investigation. In Quain's *The God of the Labyrinth* the solution is erroneous, and careful perusal of an early chapter of the book will apparently reveal 'what really happened'. Quain's *April March*, like Knight's *Success*, like Ts'ui Pen's *The Garden of the Forking Paths*, investigates possible and bifurcating realities. Nabokov's novel is 186 pages longer than Borges's six-page story.

Novel, story; there's little to be gained by claiming that the zig-zag stripes of the one are better, worse or preferable to the distinguishing spots of the other. Apart from the obvious differences – volume of words, and the reader's time (not to mention the writer's) – it would be foolish to make any generalizations. To be specific: Borges claims that he has never written a novel because he is too lazy and because he has always been a reader of stories, not of longer fictions; Nabokov has written short stories, but with one exception – *Scenes from the Life of a Double Monster* – they seem pretty forgettable. Better then, surely, to consider both as authors of fictions and to ignore all of Nabokov's words and arrant, accursed, awful, annoying alliterations, jejune jests and funny puns, and marvel at the slick artifices, the breathtaking construction etc? Of course not – all similarities between the two disappear when one considers that Nabokov is not often interested in any kind of metaphysical or philosophical speculation, that for him the words are an end in themselves and that *Lolita* was 'the result of a love affair with the English language.' One might, though, go on for ever drawing parallels which – such

is the wont of lines in such juxtaposition – never meet . . . or perhaps they did, though God knows how, in these words at the very end of *Sebastian Knight*: 'Sebastian's mask clings to my face, the likeness will not be washed off. I am Sebastian, or Sebastian is I, or perhaps we both are someone whom neither of us knows.'

In *The Aleph* Borges, in a distinctly Nabokovian way, provides commentaries to the stories. In the note on *The Circular Ruins* he says: 'I now think of fine writing, which this tale comes continually to the brink of, as a beginner's mistake'. No wonder then that Nabokov, who in his old age has become more and more prone to overwrite – notably in *Ada* and the reworked, self-conscious, self-congratulatory version of *Despair* – should describe Borges's later stories as 'lunfardo and local colour.' (Lunfardo is a variety of Buenos Airean slang). Both have always been present in his work, but whereas formerly they took second place to 'the clever adjective and the classy noun', the artifice and the fantasy, now they loom large as life. It is interesting that the change in Borges's stories develops from about the time when he was losing his sight; when he could see the world about him he wanted to transform it, now that he's blind he wants to re-create what he saw. Ironically, although he stoically maintains that his loss of sight enables him to see all that is within him, he has lost his absolutely unmatched gift for pictorial detail.

He has always – and this is surprising in one who could state that 'unreality is the condition of art' – been fond of the device of bringing himself into a story as the person to whom various 'true' events are related and now he incessantly relies on it in his ambiguous accounts of knife fights, gauchos and acts of revenge, and in his tale drawn from Argentinian folklore. Such tales – one might say such simple tales – as *The Intruder*, *The Meeting* and *The Captive* will almost certainly disappoint those who when they think of Borges think of a fabulous maze inhabited by learned criminals and strange men seeking immortality and omnipotence, and who consider him (and for once a back cover eulogy doesn't seem immodest) the world's greatest (living) short story writer.

1971

Borges (2): Industry

If there's an adjective derived from Sisyphus then it might be usefully and accurately applied to the task of writing criticism of Borges, whose literature takes as its subject matter already existing – actually or imaginatively – literature and the problems of description, narrative and invention and is resultantly inward looking and sharply self-conscious. The scholars and commentators who contribute to this volume are fully aware then of the traps casually and cunningly set by the author; naturally though they attempt to brave them and just as naturally they slip into them. They fall, I think, because they are *fans* first and critics second. So original analysis is replaced by rapturous praise and comfortable repetition of Borges's own deft statements on his art – he is only too willing to reveal his faintly quaint and very diverse sources, his lifelong obsessions, his opinions of all sorts of writers *etc.* Yet all the knowledge in the world of the influences on his work will not enable anyone to transmit its singular strangeness and greatness – the reader must return to the text, outside which there is nothing (save facetious and misleading footnotes).

The present writer and those whose essays are published here are by no means the first to pay tribute. A bibliography at the back of the book lists over 500 articles, essays, monographs, reports and books devoted to the 73-year-old writer, most of them bearing titles such as: 'Borges and Borges, the Argentine and the Metaphysician', or 'The Flaunting of Artifice in Jorge Luis Borges and Vladimir Nabokov'. (An excellent essay, available in this country.) Gay Talese, an American reporter in the tradition of American reporters – recently he authored a no-punches-pulled, fearless, revealing and best

selling whitewash job on the Bonnano family of New York hoods – wrote a piece in the *New York Times* 10 years ago called 'Argentine Here on Tour Finds Advantage in Blindness'. Congratulations to the sub.

Donald A Yates who was responsible for many of the translations in the Penguin edition of *Labyrinths* writes in a mercifully straightforward essay, in which he doesn't attempt to parody Borges – a hazardous game – that the 'cardinal points' of Borges are as follows: his consciousness of being an Argentine and his feeling for the country's history and folklore, his peculiar devotion to English language and literature, his interest in metaphysics and philosophy and his fondness for gangster stories, tales of adventure, western movies, *etc.* There is nothing startlingly new about Yates's analysis – Borges has often, as mentioned above, pointed to these diverse tastes which show themselves so strongly in his work. What is of interest is Yates's comment that the last mentioned aspect of Borges is the least studied aspect of his work. In an interview a couple of years ago Borges said: 'If you read detective novels, and if you take up other novels afterwards, the first thing that strikes you – it's unjust, of course, but it happens – is to think of the other books as being shapeless.'

Thus he learned that plots, 'drama' and melodrama, 'story-line', and structured narrative were important; nowhere in his fictions, which are so economically executed, does he allow himself to indulge in formless psychological writing. Further he carries detective story techniques into nearly all his works, with the result that he writes as if he's telling all action adventure stories. Perhaps it is because his fictions have such clearly defined narratives that he has gained such a large non-specialist following; it is not surprising that commentators who consider him a 'thinker' should be perplexed by his fervent admiration of writers like Poe, Stevenson and Chesterton, who hitherto have frequently been considered fit only for adolescents fascinated by mazes and cryptograms. These writers were concerned with the construction of stories rather than with analysis of characters or pointing of morals, and, such is the climate of not only critical but public opinion, are

not granted the accolades that fall to such scribblers as, say, Forster and Lawrence and, nowadays, hausfraus like Drabble, O'Brien and Mortimer – authors of penetrating studies of penetration *etc.* Of course it would be ludicrous to deny that in the hands of all save a few masters (Bentley, Buchan and Chandler among them) mystery, adventure and detective stories are weighed down with expository lumber – Lord Peter, Appleby and Campion were forever repeating to various characters information already imparted to the reader. Needless to say Borges has no time for such verbose devices or for drawn-out dénouements.

Ronald Christ – what a name – attempts, unsuccessfully, to use Borges's methods of commentaries on fictitious texts to write criticism of the author. So he comments on commentaries – all very arch, and for the most part unenlightening except for a perceptive piece in which he points to the words that Borges has, in a way, made his own and uses in a very personal and mannered fashion. Christ suggests 'annihilate' and 'arduous' *etc.* I would add *'rigorous'* and *'terrible'*, the latter word having been 'borrowed' from Chesterton. Christ (has he ever written on the advantages he gains from possession of such a handle?), an earnest scholar to be sure, suggests that a monthly magazine devoted entirely to criticism of Borges should be published. God – if he may be brought in too – forbid; it would be sad to see Borges disappear, in the way that Joyce has done, beneath tomes of serious assessment by serious students who constantly fail to perceive that his greatness lies in his amazing powers of invention, imagination, and construction – that is to say as a writer of fiction, to which philosophy and metaphysics remain subservient.

This book will appeal only to the most dedicated Borges-watchers (a term that seems to have been coined by the lexicographer Burwood* in 'Borges and Bousquet: The Dreamed Worlds of the Infirm'). There is not a great deal to amuse the common reader, though he may be fascinated by two coincidental couplings of names, that of one of the editors,

* He died in 1979 when a shelf of dictionaries collapsed on him.

Ivar Ivask, and those of two European writers on Borges – Gerard Genot and Gerard Genette, who may of course be figments of the imagination of James E Irby of Princeton, I doubt it though.

The Cardinal Points of Borges eds Lowell Dunham and Ivar Ivask

1972

Borges (3): More Industry

These are early days in the Borges business. Who can say how the affair will fare? Bloom like the Joyce industry, wilt like the Hemingway trade? Of course potential runners are probably inhibited by the irritating fact of Borges's comparative longevity and by his quite immodest willingness to talk about himself and his work; when he passes over the field will be wide open and well subscribed, till then expect but few intrepid pathfinders from forward-looking departments of Latin American studies anxious to establish claims. In an article I wrote a couple of years ago I noted that 'serious students . . . constantly fail to perceive that his [Borges's] greatness lies in his amazing powers of invention, imagination and construction – that is to say as a writer of fiction, to which philosophy and metaphysics remain subservient'. J M Cohen, in his 'short introductory account', studiously ignores – one suspects that he hardly recognizes their importance as the basis of his subject's art – all consideration of Borges's numerous but frequently repeated devices and tricks and, more oddly still, of his mannered, baroque and unique prose style. He sticks grimly to his format of critical biography, dwelling on such jejune matters as the precise point at which the author ceased to show the influence of Ultraism with which movement he had been associated, the apparent paradox of a man who admits no personal concern with religion yet writes stories of a mystical and speculative nature, Borges as a South American writer and so on. All of which is doubtless very worthy of praise but neither illuminating nor exciting – the literary scholar's perpetual belief in the pertinence of comparison of writers who are by chance contemporaries or natives of the same subcontinent is a source of enervation to persons

of sound mind. It is ridiculous to attempt, as Cohen does, to find links between Borges and Neruda whilst barely mentioning those writers to whom Borges has some real – that's to say artistic – affinity, *viz* France, Stevenson, Kafka, Kipling. Cohen's hugest folly, though, is to suggest that the title tale of the new collection, *Dr Brodie's Report*, may be read 'as a protest by the other, public Borges, lionized on American campuses, and in danger of being torn apart by enthusiastic ladies' clubs'. Let's excuse this as a case of some kind of transference of sublimated desires couched in terms of apparent reproach, OK, Doc?

Whilst the old Borges (the younger Borges) was a mandarin spellbinder, a true original, a specialist in almost unbelievably elaborate metaphors, an artificer who shamelessly flaunted his cleverness the new Borges seems set on presenting himself as a humble teller of simple tales and to this end has abandoned all his stylistic and narrative excesses and adopted a phoney folky sitting around the campfire spinning a yarn approach which in its desperate concern to be down to earth is just as mannered as was his previous stance. No one though, save Norman Thomas di Giovanni, more of whom soon, would claim that these new pieces even get as far as the foothills of the heights which the great stories of the Forties and Fifties ascended. As Cohen remarks, the best among them are those which are closest to his old stories; however, those which Cohen cites as possessing this quality are those which I consider most manifestly lack it. *The Gospel According to Mark* and *Dr Brodie's Report* seem to me the most fully realized and least predictable pieces in the collection which comprises eleven stories, two of which, Borges rather quaintly holds, show the influence of Henry James. Most of them concern small time hoods, knife fights, inevitable violence and friendship; several of them, notably *The Gospel According to Mark*, which is very frightening indeed, and *The End of the Duel*, which is rather horrible, would make excellent movies, in fact they almost cry out for the attentions of a carefully groomed mogul – Borges has undergone, to borrow Anthony Burgess's measure, the transformation from Class 2 writer to Class 1. *Dr Brodie's Report*, with its allusions to Swift, its description of a

people who have lost the power of language and its device of a found and incomplete manuscript recalls *The Immortal.* Illiterates who nevertheless retain a kind of ancestral memory of certain myths and texts are the protagonists of *The Gospel According to Mark.* It would, however, be unwise to assume that this is a coming theme – these stories are unquestionably the exceptions in an unremarkable collection.

Those whose introduction to Borges was the volume *Fictions* will have observed with, I should guess, something less than pleasure the intrusion into all matters concerning the writer in English of one Norman Thomas di Giovanni, a Hiberno-Italian-Argentine with a ready smile and a solicitous air who has replaced the excellent Anthony Kerrigan and Alistair Reid as the main translator of Borges into English, works as his amanuensis and appears to have had a decisive and regrettable influence on his master's prose; he seems to foster a deliberate linguistic imprecision and be fond of some quite awful turns of phrase, 'along about', *etc.* His smugness, his ghastly basking in reflected glory and his weedy sycophancy are demonstrated to the full in *Borges on Writing,* which is no more than the transcripts of three seminars over which Borges presided at the Creative Writing School of Columbia University a couple of years ago. The result is, of course, as dire and tedious as one might expect.

Jorge Luis Borges by J M Cohen
Dr Brodie's Report by Jorge Luis Borges
Borges on Writing eds Norman Thomas di Giovanni et al

1974

Borges (4): Fabulist

Extraordinary Tales is an apt title for this anthology of the fantastic compiled by Borges and Bioy Casarés (who also collaborated in the creation of the detective stories *Seis Problemas para Don Isidoro Parodi* which haven't, so far as I know, been translated into English). The peculiarity of the volume lies not so much in its inclusion of many brilliant and rather recondite fragments as in one's conviction upon reading them that Borges might have written them all himself. That one should receive such an impression points not only to the homogeneity of the pieces collected and to the fact that Borges has included examples of the work of all his acknowledged masters, and some of his disciples too, but, more interestingly, to his uncanny ability to persuade the reader familiar with his own creations to look at those of others through his eyes. He has written elsewhere that 'reality favours symmetries and anachronisms,' and this book, like all his work (even the most sceptical will come to believe that it is his work), illustrates that maxim. Duplications abound, and not only within the confines of a fragment; in different ages and different cultures Borges discovers parallel phenomena – at battles centuries apart games of chess map the fortunes of the opposing forces; Kubla Khan conceived Xanadu according to a dream and, hundreds of years on, Coleridge (a big cheer here for the fruit of the poppy) dreamed his 'Kubla Khan'. The uninitiated will be forgiven for assuming that Borges is a follower of Jung, that by drawing attention to such symmetries he is seeking to vindicate certain of the analyst's theories. In *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche* Jung noted: 'Meaningful coincidences are unthinkable as pure chance . . . Their inexplicability is not due to the fact that the cause is unknown, but to the fact that

a cause is not even thinkable in intellectual terms.' Borges is more fanciful, less didactic, altogether more appealing and speculative: '. . . the series of dreams and labours has not yet ended . . . perhaps the series of dreams has no end or perhaps the last one who dreams will have the key.' (Jung, incidentally, gets short shrift – way above the knee – from Borges who is uncharacteristically sarcastic when he says: 'Jung the Swiss in charming and doubtless accurate volumes compares literary inventions to oneiric inventions, literature to dreams.')

The fantastic, as defined by Borges, has precise limits. He is not entirely accurate when he says that he rejects the supernatural; rather he rejects it as an explanatory device, yet at the same time founds many of his fictions on the apparently unaccountable. That a dreamed event should take place, that the imagined should intrude on physical reality are matters of the greatest possible fascination for him, to be re-created, 'invented', played with and exploited, yet never to be invested with a definitive 'meaning' or explanation. (He is wary, too wary you might think, of the 'aesthetic error' which he considers debased Hawthorne: '. . . the Puritan desire to make a fable out of each imagining induced him to add morals and sometimes to falsify and deform them.') The themes from which he only rarely departs are those of the transference of a 'soul' or mind from one body to another (Kubla Khan to Coleridge?), the invention of metaphors, blurred and mistaken identities, impossible journeys . . . those elements which challenge or render ridiculous the 'natural' (rational and traditional humanist) order.

In his essay on Hawthorne in *Other Inquisitions* he says: 'One writer thinks in images (Shakespeare or Donne or Victor Hugo, say), and another writer thinks in abstractions (Benda or Bertrand Russell).' This is necessarily arbitrary and inaccurate – he makes this division in a discussion of the root of allegories but I quote it here as a definition of two modes, antithetical poles between which Borges appears not to fall; rather he bestrides the pair, keeping a foot in both camps *etc.* Which is remarkable and probably unique, or seems so to me without the benefit of an academic training in philosophy. (What he gleans from, say, Schopenhauer has little or nothing

to do with 'philosophy' as taught in GB. He is content to reduce ideas to two line aphorisms which accord with his own scheme of things; he admits in an epilogue to a 'tendency to evaluate religions or philosophical ideas on the basis of their aesthetic worth and even for what is singular and marvellous about them.') His creation of gaudy images, prolonged metaphors for abstractions seems the main reason that he should never have attempted a novel – he says casually that he is too lazy. Really he has little interest in 'characterization', and in novels it's the characters who predominate, whereas in a story the plot or the mechanism can always remain visible. His characters are distinguishable by their external attributes and by their actions rather than by their 'psychological' make up. He deals in archetypes rather than in rounded portraits which reveal 'depth'.

Richard Burgin's book owes its main interest to his ability to get Borges to talk on unfamiliar topics. Anybody who saw Borges lecturing in London a couple of years ago will have noted, maybe to their disappointment, that the man and the author appeared to be one – that he quoted lengthily, unself-consciously and without his alluding to his doing so, from his essays and that the various (myriad) masks he adopts as a writer were never dropped. It is a curious and remarkable feature of Borges that each of his fictions, essays, discourses and poems is, to some extent, the sum of all the rest – different facets of the same stone. (Though he doesn't actually say so he often implies that all a writer ultimately reveals is himself: '. . . aims and literary theories are nothing but stimuli; the finished work often ignores and even contradicts them'.) So of especially great (curiosity and entertainment) value in this series of interviews are his observations on for instance Hiroshima, about which he talks in a strangely impersonal, anti-humanistic way, considering the ethical and moral question it raises as he might consider the likelihood of the existence of one final apocalyptic word. And on Sartre he is funny though, perhaps deliberately, at his own expense: 'I dislike people who are out for propaganda. I don't think he should have allowed a café to be called Café Existentialism . . . And I could hardly think of him as a gentleman, though, of

course, that's another old fashioned word, no?' Most of the ground covered, however, already displays the prints of his almond-toed black Oxfords – labyrinths, mirrors, detective stories, Browning, Don Quixote etc.

In translation he is celebrated chiefly as a writer of prose fictions. In his own country he is equally famous as a poet. Pound asserted that poetry should be as well written as prose. One is led to suspect that Borges doesn't concur with this. His poems are less spectacularly executed than his prose pieces and in them he does not so consistently manifest his virtuosity and his singularity. His verse seems – if the word can be applied – naturalistic and though, of course, it doesn't necessarily follow, 'spontaneous', less worked. Those poems collected in *Dreamtigers* (together with a variety of sketches, parables and concise fictions) are good, readable and most certainly not to be dismissed; but one misses the feeling of the author on a tightrope, one regrets the absence of the magician. His habit of compiling catalogues – his taste, if you enjoy them – is given full rein in his last verse, which is a pity, for it is one of the least auspicious features of his prose. Still it's petty to point at the spots on a star, the blemishes on her breasts. One should be grateful for the great pleasures afforded by the inventions of this extraordinary cerebral adventurer.

Extraordinary Tales by Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares
Other Inquisitions by Jorge Luis Borges
Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges by Richard Burgin
Dreamtigers by Jorge Luis Borges

1974

Borges (5): Documentarist?

The seven very modest (by their author's standards) prentice prose pieces written for a Buenos Aires newspaper in 1933–4 which comprise *A Universal History of Infamy* (this volume, as we have come to expect with Borges in translation, is padded out with a variety of fragments, most of which are already available in England), are of a far less rigorous and demanding nature than the author's subsequent fictions. They are picturesque, vivid, strictly not psychologically analytical reconstructions of the stories, the legends of a variety of colourful and nefarious characters – Lazarus Morrell, The Widow Ching, Kotsuke no Suke, Monk Eastman and more familiarly The Tichborne Claimant, Billy the Kid and the Veiled Prophet.

Borges has never been more comic than in the tale of Orton alias Castro alias Roger Tichborne – it's belly laughter, rather than the knowing smile of self congratulation, which this short narrative with its preposterous protagonists and wealth of concisely depicted detail provokes. Preceding the Nazi dictum on the size of his lies Orton, loutish, obese and boorish passed himself as effete, slight, gentlemanly Roger Tichborne – a fraudulent act of genius. One wonders if, had Borges written these pieces fifteen years later, he would have included Han Van Meegeren, no less audacious a poseur and more successful to boot.

In order, maybe, to stress its conjectural, 'inaccurate' nature he has entitled his piece on Billy the Kid 'The Disinterested Killer Bill Harrigan'. The Kid's name was, of course, William Bonney, and to give him this odd handle and to change the circumstances of his death (Pat Garrett was indoors when he shot the young psychopath who, incidentally, was dismounted, not galloping along a dusty street) seems gratuitous

for nobody could possibly mistake the piece for a slice of documentary reportage – the slums of NY where Billy grew up during the Sixties are invested with the same qualities as the North Side of Buenos Aires, whither the author doubtless ventured as a child during the first decade of this century and gleaned those impressions – of petty gangsters, gauchos, knife fights, the rhythm of the tango – which have stood him in pretty good stead ever since, especially in stories like *Street-corner Man* which is to be found here in new translation.

The laying on of heavy strokes of local colour has always been one of the author's predominant traits and the more one reads of him – outside of his twenty or so 'metaphysical' tales and fables – the more limited seem his means and aims. His predictable reliance on the basic elements of gothic stories gets to be enervating. (In this he has, I think, been rather poorly served by his recent English publishers who, as I've mentioned, greedily and carelessly include pieces which have appeared up to four times previously in other volumes; Allen Lane have even gone so far as to present this volume in precisely the fount employed by Cape in *The Aleph*.)

In the introduction to the first edition Borges makes an acknowledgement the implications of which he seems, uncharacteristically, to ignore. He says that the early films of Von Sternberg were a great influence on these tales – in fact all they have in common with movies like *Morocco* and *Shanghai Express* is an emphasis on decor and setting and props.

Now it must be patently evident to everyone that the camera, and so the spectator, can take in a great deal in the way of 'atmosphere' whilst concentrating on the action of the narrative being played out before it; in print we have to depart from the drama to gather data of this (secondary) nature – in a novel such diversions need not bother us, indeed such diversions may well form the novel, but in a story of a couple of thousand words an author's concern for ambience can often come to be mistaken for his over indulgence of a facility for listing the graphic and incongruous elements of the backdrop.

Potential readers should be further warned that the cover is, in its trendy way, as dreadful as can be and that the book is

over priced (by books' standards that is. Books are ridiculously cheap for all those long hearthside hours of entertainment that they afford. Under our enlightened Chancellor's present regime you're lucky if you can find a tube of toothpaste for the price demanded for these smooth pages).

A Universal History of Infamy (trans Norman T di Giovanni) by Jorge Luis Borges

1974

About Vonnegut

Nowadays Kurt Vonnegut, Jnr is plain Kurt Vonnegut. Without doubt you'll remember that Ricky Nelson became Rick – he muttered something about being mature.

Hey Mom, gimme da key to da door,
'Cos you see, I ain't a kid no more,
I got myself a real special date,
And Mom, I'm gonna be out late.

In *Bad Day at Tracey Rock* the children in the lowest grades at High School were determined to drop their cute familial nicknames. Vonnegut has presumably lost his suffix as a ploy to demonstrate that he's no longer to be regarded as a small time genre writer. In fact there's no reason why he should be, for he quit writing novels that bear any relation to conventional science fiction with the publication of *Mother Night*, 11 years ago. It's an elaborately constructed fantasy which purports to be the confessions of Howard W Campbell, Jnr, an American playwright who broadcast propaganda for the Third Reich. Campbell writes the short, ironic, twisting chapters which comprise the book in a Jerusalem jail whilst awaiting trial as a war criminal. However, unbeknown to the Israeli agents who captured him, to the German and American people, to his parents and his wife, to everybody save three people, Campbell was an American agent – the pauses, coughs, stutters and vocal mannerisms of his broadcasts formed a code which carried information out of Germany to the Allies. Vonnegut writes in his introduction to the second edition that the 'moral' of the book is 'We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be.' Pretence, the lies of the propagandist and the artist, subterfuge and the assuming of identities form the subject

matter of the novel. Just as Campbell is not what he appears to be nor are the characters who surround him – his 'wife' who turns up in New York, whither he fled in 1945, is his wife's sister, a Russian agent, as is his chess playing painter neighbour. Of the three people who knew that Campbell was an American agent two, one of them was Roosevelt, are dead and the other worked under an assumed name; a Russian interpreter who found Campbell's manuscripts when Berlin fell publishes them as his own; and Campbell assumes the very surest of all disguises in New York, he goes under his own name – a gambit suggestive of Chesterton's advice on where best to hide a leaf. Until the characters are exposed there is little suggestion of role playing – and when the 'real' selves are revealed it is clear that they are but replicas of the masks they wore; thus the woman who impersonates Campbell's wife falls in love with him just as her sister had done, and Kraft, Campbell's neighbour, who was formerly Ivan Potapov, is far more at home as a drunk dauber, a chess addicted philosopher and as Campbell's confidant than he is as a Communist agent. Of course Campbell, as the 'author' of the piece, the witness of the masquerade as well as its leading character, does not surprise us with a sudden tearing of a stocking from his face – instead we gradually come to realize that it is set forever; no matter what his conception of himself, he is, to the whole world, an ignominious traitor, a willing servant of the most bestial order of modern times. Vonnegut, resignedly rather than cynically, proves the primacy of surfaces and demonstrates that actions speak louder than thoughts – there is a criticism implicit in this and his other novels of the urge to seek causes, motivations etc. He petitions us in *Mother Night* to consider that Campbell is ignorant of why he does what he does and, yet, that his actions are not explicable in conventional 'psychological' terms. Campbell is intelligent and self conscious, quite aware that his 'lies' may have a more profound effect than the 'truth' that they conceal. Eventually the reader is persuaded to believe that Campbell simply fulfilled his 'destiny', which was to be both an agent of a destructive force and the object destroyed.

Vonnegut's method in *Mother Night* and his subsequent

fictions was radically different from that which he had used in his first two novels. Comparisons are frequently drawn between some modern works of fiction and comic strips – it's well known that Joyce enjoyed penny dreadfuls. Certain comic strips do have an immediacy which is achieved by a rigorous adhesion to story line, the knowing and sometimes arch use of clichés and slogans, a caricaturist's graphic style, and sharply defined characters. That at any rate is the conception of the strip cherished and fostered by 40 year old teenager pundits eager to demonstrate how very hip they are. (The text of the *Penguin Book of Comics* is an extraordinarily embarrassing indictment of the menopausal enthusiasm of media hounds for the pulp which, as youths, they scornfully shunned in favour of books without pictures.) Most comics – name your own half dozen exceptions in coupon provided – are witless, not bad enough to be laughable, poorly drawn, repetitive, badly observed etc. The strip is close to the silent film with subtitles – the words illustrate the pictures, not vice versa. Vonnegut's vitally vivid vernacular veers away from that of the strip towards that of 'sophisticated' copy. His style *is* slick and does often rely on slogans of an epigrammatic nature; he tends to write short paragraphs and short chapters, his tone is eminently reasonable, sympathetic and humane, sometimes to the point of sentimentality – his short stories are often not far removed from all American whimsy, the sugar coat covers a saccharine pill.

In comparison with *Mother Night*, *Player Piano*, his first novel, is a somewhat pedestrian affair. It's a fairly heavy handed and rather transparent satire on an over-automated society of the near future. Protagonist Paul Proteus belongs to the managerial élite which comprises a minute percentage of the American people – the vast bulk of the population works in the 'Reeks and Wrecks', repairing roads and undertaking those manual tasks still better executed by humans, or in the army. Paul gradually grows aware of the hopeless lack of self respect the system engenders in the ordinary people and like a latter day Ned Ludd leads a revolt against the machines, which is every bit as unsuccessful as that of his mythic precursor. He appreciates the futility of his gesture and as he watches his

unrealizable project crumbling around him, troops closing in, his future black and his aspirations shattered, he notes that: 'Most fascinating game there is, keeping things from staying the way they are.'

Despite its debt to Orwell, its crude construction and its inability to dissemble its didacticism *Player Piano* is, within the rather stifling limitations of its convention, a not unsuccessful book. It also points to one of Vonnegut's most evident talents – his ability to ridicule the solid 'n' sound, sham humility of crassly materialistic Middle America. Annually those managers who have not 'reached their full potential' holiday in an atmosphere of bonhomie, over-familiarity (Call me Paul (or Ed or Joe) or pay me 5 dollars), and healthy competition at the Meadows, a New England island. Songs proclaiming a homespun, folkweave philosophy of self help, independence, and godliness are sung in hearty unison; America, 'heart', progress and togetherness are celebrated in a variety of traditional rituals – and those who step out of line, whose 'etiquette' is not perfect, severely prejudice their futures. Vonnegut uses a sparse, scenario-like style to describe this blandly nightmarish summer camp – the lack of comment (the book is written in the third person) and the habitual understatement serve to underline the truly horrific ethos of this community. The America of *Player Piano* is cruelly considered by the managers to be a model state, it has been created with the express intention of giving more and more people less and less to do. The cost to the broken spirited subjects is not considered by those who govern their lives. Man's attempts to plan and create utopia in the face of overwhelming odds is a theme which Vonnegut broaches in nearly all of his fictions, from a variety of standpoints and with differing degrees of 'success' – a book which attempts a commentary on an invented world is, naturally, the blue print for that world and, should we choose not to suspend disbelief, the world itself. Vonnegut is constantly speculative and would appear to consider the creation of literature a branch of utopian conjecture which, in turn, is a branch of the very basic need to create patterns (or plots). The writer and the artist can, if they so elect, formulate patterns of an inventive

rather than an expressive nature – their role is, however, a passive one. They are not men of action. Few have the chance to indulge their fantasies with the freedom of the independent artist in 'non-creative' areas of activity. The cherished projects of which dreams are made are simply unrealizable to all save a select band. Money helps. Rockefeller, Carnegie, Guggenheim . . . the list is far from endless. The self perpetuating, high-handedly altruistic institutions which bear the names of great American patriarchs have created their own vast bureaucracy to dispense their munificence and have, in so doing, rendered themselves virtually indistinguishable from 'official' bodies playing the same game.

Eliot Rosewater is born into one of America's indescribably wealthy families and can do absolutely what he likes with the huge annual income of the Rosewater Foundation. He forgoes the hi-life, embarks on a bizarre journey across the USA, signs on with the Volunteer Fire Service in those towns where he stops and ends up in Rosewater County, the original location of the source of his family's wealth. Eliot takes up residence in the town which bears his name – it is a tarnished utopia, originally built for Rosewater employees during the late nineteenth century; it is a Midwestern equivalent of the 'model villages' (an extraordinarily optimistic epithet) built in this country by enlightened moguls like Lever, Cadbury and Salt. Another 'Utopia' with the childishly hopeful name of New Ambrosia had once existed in Rosewater County – of course it, too, had failed, the German communards who inhabited it having long since departed. Eliot, who may or may not be insane – he certainly has an overabundance of altruistic energy – determines that he shall be an 'artist'.

'"An artist." "I'm going to love these discarded Americans, even though they're useless and unattractive. That is going to be my work of art."'

He becomes guide and god to the human wrecks to whom he extends his benevolence and, in turn, takes his cue from the works of Kilgore Trout, an elderly and wasted science fiction writer who conceives ideal futures where charity is liberally dispensed and nobody wants for love. Eliot, like Trout, like Lincoln Ewald, a utopian of a different sort (Nazi)

who is a pale reflection of the vehemently racist Rev Lionel Jones in *Mother Night*, lives in materially base surroundings which his wife and his father find abhorrent. They – his father is a senator – adopt what politicians tend to term a realistic viewpoint: be good to the system and the system will be good to you. Vonnegut's blindly idealistic characters, quixotic creatures all, are doomed to failure. In their attempts to transmit their different versions of the same vision they cause their friends, families and, sometimes, the avaricious objects of their attention pain and suffering; well intentioned, they wreak havoc.

To reinforce the credibility, the 'reality' – it will of course be eventually discredited – of his fictions Vonnegut relies heavily upon that traditional prop of the fantasist, the work within the work. His invented works appear in a variety of guises – memos, psychiatric reports, quotes from books of reference, summaries of novels, letters and, singularly, 'The Books of Bokonon' in *Cat's Cradle* which is, perhaps, Vonnegut's most accomplished novel. Employing another fantastic device – mingling the purportedly 'real' and 'fictional' – he constructs what may be a parable about creation and destruction and what is certainly a multifaceted and amazingly inventive commentary on what used to be called human folly. The narrator, who like Melville's Ishmael miraculously – and 'impossibly' – lives to tell the tale, sets out to write a book called *The Day the World Ended* about 6 August 1945 when America unloaded an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. He never writes the book, but goes on to see its title become actuality, the old planet's demise being wrought by one of the same hands that obliterated Hiroshima. Bokonism, the religion of the inhabitants of San Lorenzo, the Caribbean island where the novel's action unfolds, tells us that atomic warfare didn't simply happen – it was *meant* to happen. Its dicta and dogma are expressed in calypsos and rather portentous aphorisms, it's a happy creed which merrily advocates daydreaming, the telling and believing of harmless lies and belief in the existence of an undefined and undefinable order as a comfortable alternative to facing the deprivations and ugliness of Harsh Reality. Since the narrator undergoes conversion to Bokonism

we can be sure, too, that his book is lies; still, the fact of the events depicted being patently and self avowedly fictitious does anything but mitigate the book's effectiveness. Bokonism is every bit as seductive and preposterous as Jung's theory of 'synchronistic phenomena' which it rather resembles. The venerable headshrinker opined that many coincidences could not be considered mere chance, that they were (are) evidence of something, you might say, bigger than ourselves . . . I suppose everyone has, at some time or another, fallen victim to this delusion; just when you're thinking about going down the strip to throw some craps with Louie and Dewey, Louie's kid brother Small Carl calls up and says how about coming down the strip to the Buckram Niterie and throwing some craps with . . . As you hang up you look deep into the recesses of your psyche and start reflecting, by the time you've reached Grand Rapids Boulevard and Hydro Park West you're convinced that you're but a mere pawn of destiny, nervously you finger your twin-tab (feel the nick of the Schick?) and picture the scene in the backroom of the Buckram in its minutest detail. Will the tableau vivant that assails your eyes when you enter that lo-dive, where a man's only safe so long as he keeps his back covered in the mirror in front of him, match the vividly clear image you hold in your mind at the moment? What if it does? And . . . who holds the cards, who weighted the dice of life? Such questions and many more like them are posed throughout *Cat's Cradle*. Vonnegut, like all his joking, playful predecessors resolutely refuses to answer them, but implies that to have asked and received no reply is better than not to have asked at all.

But no matter how much speculation, daydreaming and escapism is indulged in, no matter how strong the walls of the interior worlds we create through the vehicles of religious, artistic and utopian pattern-making we still remain prey to those agencies bent on perverting apparently innocent inventions. Dr Felix Hoeniker, 'one of the so-called "Fathers" of the first atomic bomb', has also sired, in addition to three extraordinary children, a substance called Ice Nine which can freeze the world – and indeed does. Hoeniker, though, was no ogre; he invented out of a love of inventing, just as his son Frank

built perfectly detailed model countries simply for the sake of building them. That the most sophisticated products of man's mind can only destroy man is a tired truth and Vonnegut is perhaps guilty of cutting corners when he contends that creative artists and scientists are ingenuous to the point where they are incapable of appreciating the implications of their actions. However it would be misleading to infer that he writes Warnings in large letters. He is, unashamedly, an entertainer whose didacticism can, in most of his fictions, be ignored, who is capable of being extraordinarily funny and of making characters 'come to life' – if anyone is interested.

Doubtless it is his preoccupation with near religious matters combined with the presumption that he actually *believes* in what he writes that has gained him such popularity with 'the campus generation'. His best selling novel seems to me to be his least demanding; *The Sirens of Titan* is an interplanetary escapist romp (his other novels are *about* escapism) used as a vehicle for a rather simplistic message of universal and, apparently, indiscriminating love. A good living, selfish and callous multi-millionaire layabout is transformed into an agent for good by a series of adventures arranged for him by a man who is stuck in a timeless void. It is a sort of Siddhartha-into-Buddha tale told with a pious meaningfulness which tends to alienate the (this) reader.

Vonnegut's most recent novel, *Slaughterhouse Five* (of which the film is a quite competent adaptation) also bears trappings of 'relevance' – this is probably the reason why numerous critics have acclaimed it as his masterpiece – and includes sequences which seem impossible in the everyday world. (Much fantasy and science fiction is simply *improbable*, unlikely to be realized.) It is not constructed with the tautness of *Cat's Cradle* or *Mother Night*, nor is it so flashily written. (At his best Vonnegut indulges in an apparently lazy, but really very worked and self conscious sort of fine writing. It may look like he's a street punk, but he's a street punk who got himself an education.) The author pops up as a grim and stoic master of ceremonies introducing scenes from his nightmarish wartime experience during the fire bombing of Dresden, slices of sheer fantasy and a commentary on the problems of

autobiographical writing – which this undoubtedly is, though the stepping stones, the points in life to which he constantly refers are his previous novels. It is an incestuous book which reads as a corollary to his whole oeuvre, and owes a certain amount to the 'New Journalism' and, surprisingly, to Genet. (There's not a seamy seaman in sight, but Vonnegut's 'distancing' himself from his material, from his past work and life does recall the Frenchman.)

His hero is called Billy Pilgrim. He, like his creator, saw the bombing of Dresden and, unlike his creator, went home to apple pie suburban America to become an optometrist, a manufacturer of corrective lenses. He also travels in time and space to the planet of Tralfamadore whose inhabitants live in the fourth dimension thus being endowed with a panoptic view of Earth and all other planets. Billy has the good fortune to be imprisoned with starlet Montana Wildhack and also learns about Tralfamadorian novels: '. . . there is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects.' Which might be a catalogue of what Vonnegut would have liked to have achieved in *Slaughterhouse Five*; he gets some of the way towards it by attempting to recognize no chronology – we are told what will happen 'later' in the book, cause and effect are not so much banished as inverted and suspense is lessened as it is when we watch a movie of which we already know the story. Though written in the third person the non linear form is that which we are led to believe is imposed on it by Billy's jumps in time. In the course of his travels he encounters Eliot Rosewater, Howard Campbell and Kilgore Trout, he is pursued and eventually murdered by a man who bears more than a passing resemblance to the man who tracked down Howard Campbell. I think Vonnegut's plan of juggling with different levels of notional realities defeats itself – the book works best as propaganda – every time a death occurs (and lots do) he writes, 'So it goes.' The cumulative effect of that phrase and all it signifies is sickening.

In time *Slaughterhouse Five* may be seen to have been the model for a whole new school of didactic writing. At the moment it seems a shadow of its author's other works, though that's no small achievement. With this novel Vonnegut may

have reached a point where he felt that the vistas he depicted and his manner of presenting them were becoming repetitive and too recognizable. Robbe-Grillet has written that there is nothing more fantastic than detailed minutiae; Vonnegut has sought to give the lie to this view. It is as if he were a painter of a hallucinatory scene employing a near photographic style who chooses to depict the key figure in his composition in a manner belonging to a completely unrelated convention, that of, say, the nuthouse primitive or the truelife romance illustrator. In *Slaughterhouse Five* the tendency towards self cancellation, apparent in all his novels, is given full rein which may, of course, be just another way of holding up a mirror to the world.

1973

B-I-G: Ernest Hemingway

Hemingway seduced with an amalgam of 'authentic' local colour, bar room wisdom, brutality of both sentiment and action, and flashy stoicism. He lived life – what else? – to the hilt, did everything BIG (an apt title for this rather fawning biography – picture the posters for the film adaptation, the letters hewn from real rock and elephant tusk) and, like most members of the race, was compounded of countless contradictory elements. Like most writers, if we are to believe their credulous biographers, he was much influenced in childhood by the 'artistic' member of his family – in this case his mother, a piano teacher and failed opera singer who not only possessed a regular stand-up joanna but a Steinway Grand as well. (In the lives of the littérateurs this 'influence' is always traced even if the chronicler has to go back through three generations to Uncle Moyshe the juggler or Cousin Nesta the Sunday watercolourist.) Ma Hemingway, we are informed, 'had a deep dyed belief in creativity'. That must have helped. The obvious influences, Jack London and Mark Twain, are mentioned here only to be refuted. Hemingway was paranoiacally (an adverb from an adjective which ought to have been more frequently employed throughout the book) keen to disclaim literary masters, just as he was quick to denigrate the works of his contemporaries: he despised Fitzgerald and was jealous of Faulkner, he reserved his praise for younger and minor figures who, by the time he had reached a position where his opinions were sought, were hardly likely to challenge his 'supremacy'.

To an urban cowboy of a generation which doesn't require its heroes to eat live lions, disembowel sharks and display a liberal range of scars and tell the tale of how they were acquired in powerful, punchy, curt, colloquial, man-sized

sentences it remains a mystery that a dumb ox (Wyndham Lewis's phrase) like Hemingway should have been so widely and loudly acclaimed. Still, all the clapping is far in the past; he's been dead now for over a decade and there's no sign of a revival of interest in his work – it may not be too wild to suggest that since the man is no longer around to grace the pages of *Time/Life*, to keep himself in the public eye with vigorous and sweaty feats, to provide a regular standby for journalists with inches to fill, maybe his work will pass quietly into obscurity, only to be lifted therefrom by students of certain pathological strains of megalomania.

It is to Carlos Baker's credit that he does not indulge in any kind of searching analysis of his subject; rather he claims, with false modesty and in the spirit of Hemingway, to be interested in 'the truth', in 'what really happened'. It's no wonder that Hemingway found so much of Faulkner's work incomprehensible, the Mississippian never ceased to demonstrate that 'the true facts of the case' don't exist; Hemingway was of the opinion that recognition of the non-existence of a predetermined reality precluded, by some tortuous steps of 'logic', the addled observer from being regarded as real. So he announced that some writers are real writers and the others . . . The others, of course, are unreal writers, the smart alec wags who write, if at all, in that sort of ink which disappears from the page soon after first making contact with it, who are only too willing to accost the real writers in bars, buy them drinks, steal their ideas and keep them from the legendary blank sheet – real writers fight in wars, unreal ones don't. It would be churlish to suggest that Baker has ruthlessly mimicked his subject's mannerisms and prejudices – he hasn't; however, since he's a scholar of some repute and, maybe, an 'intellectual', a breed which Hemingway, characteristically, hated, he's being rather jesuitical when he takes upon himself certain attitudes not normally associated with those of his calling and sees fit to ape Man of Action reactions to 'poseurs', 'phoneys', 'cowards', etc. He has also lifted numerous passages from *A Moveable Feast* without acknowledging the fact – so the earliest pictures in the book of the Fitzgeralds are those that Hemingway himself had painted in his bitchy and spiteful memoir written when he had all but lost his reason.

There's no doubt that he was gaga at the end of his life – one's tempted to say 'in his old age', but he wasn't particularly old in years, though in the last photos he might well be an octogenarian. Throughout his life from adolescence he was preoccupied with suicide – his father's way of death and that, too, of his first wife's father – but there's no evidence that he made any attempts prior to his first, final and fatal essay in 1961. Nobody should be led into concluding, as certain commentators already have, that there's a connection between an artistic or imaginative interest in self-slaughter – it's a very useful device, that's all – and the actual performance of the act. Baker is equivocal on Hemingway's end, investing the moments preceding the shots, in a novelistic way, with a certain drama whilst resisting any temptation to glorify it. I am sure that in New Haven or New Brunswick or Ann Arbor a rising scholar is pondering the parallels between Hemingway and Mishima so I'll forgo drawing any myself; suffice it to mention that Mishima had not dried up mentally and that he acted – not that it's in any way a vindication of him – within the conventions of a rigorous tradition.

Baker's thesis, if that's what it can be called, seems to indicate that if you're an artist, especially one who has received a Nobel Prize and is granted the tag 'great', it's OK, just fine, in fact, to behave in the most boorish, loutish, inconsiderate and crass manner conceivable; norms of politeness and demeanour must be bent in the face of the 'creative'. This, of course, is an ideal cherished by the liberal and not so liberal which is constantly reinforced by films and popular works on the lives of creative persons where smashing up the furniture or setting light to baby are not to be considered symptoms of some inner disorder but, rather, manifestations of the spirit of genius. One can't help but imagine that those Middle American ladies who attend lectures by visiting celebrities wouldn't mind having their rhinestone encrusted spectacles spat on, their way of life derided and their clubrooms torn apart if the havoc was caused by the hands and mouth of a powerful, moving and relevant novelist . . . I know he raped Mary-Alice but he's such an interesting person and really deep. 'Even in conversation Ernest behaved like a true artist.

He spoke hesitantly. His tendency was to pause between words and then to speak gently with great decision.' This true artist truly believed John O'Hara when the latter called him 'the most important author since the death of Shakespeare'.

One rather more serious contender for that title (it's dreadful the way one begins to subscribe to such notions), James Joyce, features a few times in this tome; typically the longest passage about him concerns Hemingway's carrying him home one night dead drunk. Others who appear more regularly include, naturally, Ernest's four wives (whatever happened to the third, who disappears from sight during the war, is not stated), Dos Passos, a pride of big game hunters including Karen Blixen's ex-husband, Buck Lanham, with whom Hemingway served after D-Day, when he behaved in a manner reminiscent of the hero of a boy's paper story (and was reprimanded for so doing), Benito Mussolini, a great interviewee, and poor Scott Fitzgerald. Near the end of his life, after *Tender* and before Hollywood, Fitzgerald began work on a novel called *Philippe, Count of Darkness*. Baker says more about it than do any of Fitzgerald's biographers, on account of his supposition that Fitzgerald was modelling his hero on Hemingway. The whole thing came to nothing; still, it's interesting to guess at what the result of this uncharacteristic venture might have been like, and wonder if it would have been any more successful than Waugh's *Helena*.

Hemingway possessed a gargantuan appetite for food as for everything else. The food he liked best was the meat of animals he had killed himself, a taste he had in common with the Cyclops. Some pages read like a catalogue of carnage and won't endear the great man to conservationists. Armchair marksmen beware too, you won't find the passages you're seeking too easily: zebras, elks, giraffes, bison, lions are not listed in the already incomplete and inaccurate index. Pelican (no mention is made of the bird so presumably Ernest never got one in his sights), in addition to omitting a bibliography, have indexed references according, I surmise, to the pagination of the Scribner's edition. Irritating. A further grouse (braces and braces and bra . . .), no photos; an inexcusable lapse when Marlene Dietrich might have been included as

welcome decoration and Clark Gable might have provided facial comparison with the hero in his early manhood, in those days when . . .

Ernest Hemingway by Carlos Baker

1973

The Ways They Saw Pound

It's a horrifying thought that 30 years hence some bright anthologist who at this moment is but a displaced seed in a foreign country may see fit to reprint this review in a collection of pieces devoted to the criticism of Eric Homberger's abilities as an editor. The volume will surely rejoice in the title 'Hats Off To Homberger' and my contribution will be preceded by a brief biography which by-passes the true facts of the case (vain glutton) and endows me with certain of the familiar attributes of the denizens of Grubstrasse. This volume will be full of the bigoted, attitudinizing, desperate and boring opinions of numerous minor poets, forgotten editors, inky, seedy, sodden hacks and, rarely, Personalities. Thus *Ezra Pound, The Critical Heritage* includes for every contribution from Ford, Chesterton or Eliot about a dozen from frankly insignificant yet weightily self-important penmen who reached their peaks with the publication of their 'Essays and Reflections'. (Cheap paper, from a little press with a big crest and a celebration which the Bells were to have attended.) These persons show themselves at their very worst when faced with the work of a man such as Pound who was, as is well known, an opinionated and talented poseur without peer who unashamedly emphasized the importance of technique and craft to the poet, who rated sleight of mind and verbal virtuosity far higher than sentiment, vision, sincerity . . . (What did happen to sincerity; now it's simply the prerogative of men with sticky hearthside tones doing the voiceovers on commercials.) Taking Pound to task for his delicate aestheticism the Italian critic Emmanuel Carnavali (misleading monicker – he was bedridden for ten years with an inflammation of the brain) wrote in 1920: 'There was exquisiteness in an Italian mother I saw in Taylor Street biting

in a sweet frenzy the mouth of her sloppy child; and she was fat and greasy too. It is the strong nosed and the big hearted love which is the most delicate.'

More deserving of serious attention are the innumerable attacks on Pound's learning and on his taste for executing 'creative translations' – which, of course, aren't translations at all. In a slight reply to an apparently solid attack on his knowledge of Latin and of the facts of Roman life Pound whined that '. . . philologists have so succeeded in stripping the classics of interest that I have already had more than one reader who has asked me "Who was Propertius?"' Wyndham Lewis, leaping to the defence of his friend, wrote that Pound 'had some other aim than that of providing a crib for schoolboys or undergraduates'. Mencken alludes to Pound's 'abysmal learning' yet concedes in the same paragraph that 'he is the most extraordinary man that American literature has seen in our time . . .' James Laughlin IV, altogether more sympathetic towards Pound than many of his earlier critics, attempted to demonstrate that, rather than proving inadequate for the tasks he set it, Pound's scholarship was the victim of his imagination. He takes four lines of Propertius's original and sets them beside Pound's version and patiently, with an indulgent smile, shows how the poet 'deftly, very deftly, misturns the sententia'. It is a brilliant piece of detective work and more importantly, as far as one can tell, a pretty accurate guide to the way Pound's jackdaw mind worked.

Strangely, or maybe not so strangely considering the high serious tenor of nearly all the pieces reprinted here, there are few plays on Pound's name. A bright sub or the author himself entitled a review of *Guide To Kulchur* by William Carlos Williams 'Penny Wise, Pound Foolish'. Williams was (and is) by no means alone in recognizing Pound's great talents while despairing of his habitual and unbreakable fondness for crankish and sometimes dangerous movements such as Guild Socialism (there are contributions from Orage and G D H Cole), Major Douglas's Social Credit and, tragically, strictly practised fascism. It would be both charitable and sage to ignore an artist's espousal of such creeds in many cases, even in Pound's if his championship of them had been limited to

non-imaginative works such as *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*. But Social Credit economics and Italian totalitarianism did play a large part in the early *Cantos*, just as his attempts to embrace and re-create pre-Renaissance Romance and Oriental cultures provided him with some sort of starting point in *Personae* and *Cathay*. Why his preoccupation with past civilizations should have caused such a furore is something of a mystery, for throughout the late 19th century numerous painters, writers and architects, including the Pre-Raphaelites and their followers, Whistler, R L Stevenson, Flaubert, Voysey and Baillie Scott, transmitted their versions of the antique and generally forgotten with great energy, if with a certain whimsicality. Pound compromised less and so his work was more 'difficult'. He may well have been the first, and perhaps the only poet to have rendered the picaresque unapproachable to its habitual devotees. He may also have been the first poet to have received the dubious honour normally reserved for novelists of being confused with his creations – Bowra called him 'a mountebank and a buffoon'.

Anthony Powell suggests in one of the early parts of *The Music of Time* that the mode of criticism (initiated by Pound and represented here by Eliot and F S Flint) prevalent in the early twenties which laid stress on devices was replaced by one which required notices (more so than lengthier commentaries) to be written from a 'committed' standpoint, Communist, psychoanalytical, theosophical, anarcho-Marxist or whatever. The student of occasional criticism – if indeed such an animal exists – will find that this volume presents a perfect paradigm of Powell's proposition. He will also find that his hitherto forgotten impressions of the schoolroom and tobacco stinking, leather elbowed English teachers will be brought joltingly to mind upon reading Wallace Rice's letter to *Dial* (1913) in which he sets out to prove that Pound is no poet by printing *The Condolence* as prose and – a masterstroke this – comparing it with Wilde's 'prose poem' *The Disciple* set out as verse. Pound could (or ought) hardly have failed to laugh at this, but maybe he was thrown by more reasoned criticism along the same lines for in *Instigations* he made the following rather sweeping distinction between prose and poetry: 'Most

good prose arises, perhaps, from an instinct of negation; it is the detailed, convincing analysis of something detestable; of something one wants to eliminate. Poetry is the assertion of a positive, that is, of a desire . . .' Rice's is by no means the only exercise in the unintentionally hilarious that Homberger has exhumed. An unsigned review of *Personae* which is known to have amused Pound contained numerous banal and quaintly regressive sentiments couched in deep purple: 'Poetry is a very ancient state, its antique frontiers thrown out as far as ages of experience show may be congruous to good government; and the mode of government (that is, the art's expression) has long ago adapted itself to the administration and control of all the various peoples and climates within the state.' This gloomy metaphor goes on to mention Strauss and Debussy as 'viceroys ruling', Whitman and Browning as 'eccentric but law abiding citizens'; Pound, however, is alleged to have 'mistaken insurgence for strength, treason for originality'. The reviewer concludes his piece with a plug for Mr Darrell Figgis's 'Vision of Life', which 'implicitly obeys the code of poetic law'.

Amidst the miscellania in the introduction is to be found a letter from Thom Gunn to the editor in which he refuses the latter permission to reprint his review of *Thrones*: 'Rereading the review I find it nasty and unfair. I do not take *Thrones* in its context of all the *Cantos*, for one thing. I do not honour the man who is probably the greatest poet we have had this century. And I do not like the complacent and uncharitable tone of the whole of my piece. It is that of a dwarf sneering at a giant.' Frank stuff. Two other contributors write postscripts dissociating themselves from certain of their former opinions. One wonders if, had they still been alive, some of Pound's ferocious and pompous early critics would have wished to swallow their words and mitigate their attacks with allusions to the days they wrote their ill-considered pieces – had bronchitis . . . scalding water had just been spilt on my pate . . . Never forget that critics, like politicians and admen, are just ordinary guys. They may even possess a station-bookstall mentality and like a book's cover just as much as its inners in which case they'll bemoan the publisher's failure to put one of Wyndham Lewis's several portraits of Pound on the front.

I suppose that it's incumbent upon those who review this book to include some kind of suitable epitaph, preferably one culled from the man's work.

. . . Out of key with his time,
He strove to resuscitate the dead art
Of poetry; to maintain 'the sublime'
In the old sense.

Ezra Pound, The Critical Heritage ed Eric Homberger

1983

Sniff My Cheese (1): William Burroughs

On the back cover of my copy of *The Naked Lunch* Mr Anthony Burgess tells me: 'Mr Burroughs joins a small body of writers who are willing to look at hell and report what they see.' Mr Nigel Burwood, whose excellent secondhand bookshop opposite Lyons at Olympia is always full of policemen and briefs from West London Court, told me recently that he has for some time been toying with the idea of giving a shelf (or two or three) to books bearing a dustjacket or back cover plug from Mr Burgess. Unlike Mr Burwood I do not believe for a moment that Mr Burgess's ubiquity as an encomiast has anything to do with cupidity; rather, I'd have thought, it points to a generosity of spirit and to a desire to see a tradition perpetuated. Nonetheless it is possible that Mr Burgess is sometimes prone to harmless hyperbole and to create an expectation that is unlikely to be met. Had he been invited to say his bit about *Cities of the Red Night* he could have done worse than to alter one word, 'hell'. For it is clear that what we have here is Burroughs's report on heaven – a place that is just like his hell but without much junk. The rest is the same. There is disease that promotes pain which is pleasure; there is time travel and rectal mucus; there is sperm describing arcs in all directions; there is a cast of mutants with rotting jockstraps and with names that will be appropriated by rock groups; there are descriptions of foetid beauty. Most of all there are lots of hangings.

Even in his wildest moments in his classical closet dreaming of lads from the Marches strung up in Shrewsbury, Housman would not have let himself go this far. When the noose tightens round the necks of Burroughs's boys and their throats are lacerated and their backs are snapped they ejaculate and

so at the moment of death they become the instruments of artificial insemination. And the males thus engendered will suffer the same fate – so each generation is a copy of that which it succeeds. Burroughs also posits a virus that shows itself down the years afflicting what may or may not be the 'same' characters in metempsychotic states. In one of the titular cities Aleister Crowley's maxim is adhered to: 'Nothing is true and therefore everything is permitted.' The same, rather regrettably, is true of the book. The 'theme' of infinite copies does give it some coherence and so do some passages of marvellous limpidity but the inevitable entropy sets in too early on. There are no *limits* to what is possible – rather like at some ideal orgy, and so freed of any constraints the author seeks to please no one but himself. Hangings, sci-fi, and buggery apart what we get is a rapidly disintegrating salad of an 18th-century pirate yarn (by Village People out of Stevenson), a sort of Sanders of the River adventure, and a self-consciously clichéd private eye dime-comic (like a bad made-for-telly movie). These are intercut in a pleasing enough way and for the first 75 or so pages the no doubt old-fashioned question 'What's going to happen next?' intermittently assails the reader. Thereafter it doesn't assail the reader because the reader has woken up to the fact that Burroughs has gone back to being the Burroughs of old and the answer is 'anything I like can happen next'. The publisher is quite wrong to talk about 'stylistic innovation'; stylistically the book is like *The Naked Lunch* – though it obviously cannot enjoy that work's novelty value – except in those bits which are pastiches. What the publisher should have done was to employ someone to get on with a spot of injudicious and promiscuous editing. The bits thus excised could have been put together to make 'books' of the very profitable sort that are sold in the 'bookshops' which surround Mr Calder's Brewer Street premises and the whole parlous enterprise of publishing the abstruse end of the avant garde would have been partially underwritten.

It is of course quite futile to blame a publisher for a poor performance by one of his star authors, especially a publisher whose list includes work that would not otherwise see the light of day. I was going to say a 'publisher committed to risk',

but apart from that being the ghastly sort of phrase that constellates the 'art pages' of papers like the *Guardian* it is not, in this instance, accurate. There is no risk in publishing Burroughs and, equally, there is no element of risk in his writing – he appears to be the willing prisoner and slave of the mode of writing that he invented to represent his junk cosmology, and it is a mode that on this showing is inappropriate to anything else. On this showing indeed Burroughs is not much more than a hip euphuist.

Cities of the Red Night by William S. Burroughs

1983

Sniff My Cheese (2): Joe Orton

If Joe Orton was still alive he'd be dying of AIDS. That is the certainty. The rest is moot. Would he live as he does if he was alive? Would he have kept delivering? Would his theatrical potency and literary impudence have been mitigated by his actual breathing presence? He'd have been 53 years old now: unthinkable really.

Because it is necessarily finite, because it is so consistent in its morality and vision, his theatrical oeuvre seems perfect, unimprovable: any addition would mar its shape – we cannot but fear he might have gone off, the way most of his coevals have. It thus follows that his death was apt, a fatidically smart coup, just the sort of job he might have dreamed up for himself (as in a way he did – the mentation of Orton and that of his lover/killer Kenneth Halliwell had often been as one. It was their increasing duality that maddened Halliwell, prompted him to get out the hammer). Without that hammer work we'd not have the swaggering cottaging legend, the anal pirate of the Holloway Road. And we wouldn't have John Lahr's exemplary biography which fuelled the legend, and nor would we have these marvellous diaries which Lahr depended on but which are still an extra tank of kerosene. This is Joe laughing harshly from the grave: his gift for offence and his terminal humour are undiminished; his brutality of sentiment allied to his felicity of expression, his contempt for the canons of propriety and taste, his super-sane singlemindedness are still thrilling. The tragedy of these diaries is not that they are a psycho-thriller whose climax, in a superb dramatic irony, is unknown to their narrator and happens off the page. Their tragedy is that of their very availability, i.e. of his death; it is precisely that his eagerness and need to shock would have

remained intact. He'd still have been at it. *Joe would have kept it up.* He'd never have got responsible. He was not only, as he says here, from the gutter, he was *of it* too and liked it there, a dandy in the crap. He revels in the fact that he was interfered with as a fourteen-year-old whilst attending a screening of *My Favourite Brunette* at the Odeon in Leicester. He loves the reek of the urinal; if you seek degradation the way he did you're surely going to have it shoved down your throat. Because he achieved celebrity and death in the Sixties he has been conscripted into the martyrology of that decade. But he was not a politician, he was not a pop star; there was more to him than the mannerisms and vacuity of either. The man was a fully formed artist, an intransigent moralist, an enemy of the lies and hype that are presidential oxygen and pop-yob air.

The first Lord Beaverbrook said his father had taught him one thing: 'To hate, to hate.' This is very likely the only thing Orton had in common with that boor. (He didn't even know Tom Driberg, whose bathetic autobiography these diaries resemble only in their record of sexual recklessness – Orton was an original and he could write, Driberg wasn't and couldn't.) How Orton could hate! Of course he had learned hatred by a different set of means from Beaverbrook, but the end was the same. He'd learned it through circumstance. He was the poorest boy in a pretentious private school; a bull-queer at a time when crass laws forbade homosexual congress; a jailbird; a failed actor and failed novelist. Beyond this his pose of contempt for the straight world contaminated, as poses will, his very being; so he became what he pretended to be. The objects of his hatred included Christmas, the Royal Family, families in general, most women, Churchill, politicians, team spirit etc, etc. His life was as tight and circumscribed and private as his art. It was a nick of his own making. What one gains from these diaries of his last seven months is the picture of an injuriously truthful man who reckons that humour which doesn't wound is not humour at all. His sexual promiscuity was wanton but not absolute – he would very occasionally reject an advance in a toilet because it was made by a *really* ugly man. Away from buggery and writing, his ideas of fun were fellatio and reading. He ate hash on holiday. He

drank little, had no interest in food, was bored by public affairs unless they were touched by scandal or corruption, was not a guest at the rag-trade and showbiz party called Swinging London. He and Halliwell, who'd been together sixteen years when they died, walked about a gloomier and more fascinating London cocooned in the private world of long familiarity, love, marriage. They drank coffee at stalls, ate at station buffets, travelled on buses, constantly overheard snatches of conversation that Orton might have composed. Here's one such snatch: 'My vagina has come up the size of a football. The matron said to me that in all her years of medical experience she'd seen nothing like it. But I've no complaints. I've been given top-class penicillin.'

Going to the theatre was not fun. He went, apparently, in order to check that the competition was wanting and that his self-appointed place high in the hierarchy of playwrights was secure. He usually found that it was – his opinions are prescient, uncharitably correct even though they are often stained with resentment. He admires the technical brio of Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* but goes on to take comfort in that play's failure to live up to its neat conceit. He was, of course, not impressed by the structureless mayhem of the nascent 'fringe' though the abandon of the appalling Living Theatre appealed to him (their off-stage conjugal arrangements, that is); their conventional nonconformism on-stage was not just anti-literary, it was a non-starter as an instrument of moral subversion because it was so loutishly bad-mannered. Avant-garde philistinism is a slingshot beside the Pershing of properly constructed work. Just how effective Orton's method was can be judged from the plaudits tipped on him by such great middlebrows as Sir Terence Rattigan and Lord (Ted) Willis: he was contemptuous of the plays of both. I don't think there's the slightest chance that Joe would have been offered a gong; and one hopes of course that he'd have declined. That's not how this singular invert saw himself. Nor, mind, did he see himself the way we do now. Despite a couple of sentences where he ponders death and dreams of being taken in the prime of life he evidently believed that he had a vigorous artistic and sexual future. He certainly didn't want

the sort of posthumous reputation that he ascribed (wrongly) to Swift, (questionably) to Dylan Thomas and (rightly) to Brendan Behan: he wanted to be remembered for his art, not his excess. As it is he got it both ways. His plays are part of the classic repertoire, and no man can go to a public loo without wondering what's going on behind this or that obscenely inscribed door.

The Orton Diaries, ed. John Lahr

1986

Have Your Cock And Eat It: Aids

Rock Hudson didn't die of AIDS. He died of botulism – *too much bad meat in the can.*

So goes one of the better gags about the big scare, it even made it on to a late telly show in New York, 'the AIDS capital of the world' according to Messrs Hancock and Carim: c.f. 'Orissa, world capital of smallpox' according to Paul Theroux. Somehow the latter, despite the containability of the disease, seems more scary – I guess it's because smallpox has, despite this half-decade's panic, held a longer grip on The Collective Fear; also, the new nosology is innocuous, a neutral acronym (though it can be happily bent by the boy Hislop to represent Anal Intercourse Death Syndrome). Besides which, of course, anything with 'pox' in its name sounds like real trouble. It was apropos of the pox (syphilis) that this apothegm was made: 'Venus for a Night, Mercury for Life.' No one has come up with anything as forlorn and funny about AIDS. The man who might have was, of course, Joe Orton – such gags have to originate on the inside, have to be tainted with treachery. But had Orton escaped Halliwell's hammer he would by now have been dead, from AIDS contracted from a forgotten zipper in a cottage between King's Cross and the Angel. The problem is, not only are we faced with this ubiquitous killer but we live in an age of such material superstition that we are supposed to grant it a frightened reverence commensurate with its cunning potency: AIDS is a Geldof among sexually transmitted diseases – the slightest crack and there!, some bore has crossed the room to remonstrate. The point is: jokes no more inhibit the processes of immunology than they do the progress of St Bob's lorries and hydraulic programmes. The cosmic timing of AIDS, the way it chose its moment to come from its epizootic

closet up the Congo, is a gift to the Moral Majority, to lovely men like Norman Fowler who would never let another man come in his mouth, to dim homophobes everywhere. Viruses, like young men, go west; had this African one followed its route of slave revenge a decade earlier (it was there for the taking) the socio-sexual reaction might have been entirely different. Would Tom Robinson have sung his naf (misogynist backslang for 'fanny', to settle that argument) anthem 'Glad To Be Gay', would Harvey Milk have become a 'martyr', would Michael Heath have earned a gnome's ransom for his strip 'The Gays'? No, and no again. The institutionalization and 'politicization' of homosexuality, which were endeavours of the 70s Minorities Industry, would not have occurred and AIDS would no doubt have been regarded as other than God's wrath against Sodom. Hancock and Carim have, in a protracted fit of venereal equity, solicited the testimonies of any number of boffins to the end that AIDS is not a 'gay plague': they combine with Dr Tony Pinching of St Mary's Hospital to achieve a magnificent disingenuousness. Dr Pinching 'feels that it is merely "an accident of social history that we initially regarded AIDS as a homosexual disease".' Tremendous, and that 'merely' is a lovely touch: it was merely an accident of social history – this can usually preface consideration of anything from the career of Jeremy Thorpe to the annihilation of Manchester United at Munich airport in 1958 (had the game of association football not evolved, had air travel not been invented, had the Busby Babes not been drawn against Red Star of Belgrade . . .). Look, Tony, the present is the sum of the past's 'accidents'. Of course it could have happened differently, but it didn't. We all know that AIDS is not exclusively a homosexuals' disease, that one of the earliest fatalities in Britain was a (female) Liverpool prostitute, that it can be contracted *in utero*, that blood transfusion is still a risky business in many countries, that if junk doesn't top you then that tainted spike will. Queers, whores, junkies – it's really too good to be true; and the black African connection makes it even better, provides the topping on the scapegoat pudding. Just as gay liberation can now be represented as sexually voracious and indiscriminate men wanting to have their cock

and eat it, so can racial supremacists point to at least a simian connection in the development of the virus before it struck man. And there may be more yet – something darker even than the congress of ape and man, something very primitive indeed.

The earliest showing of the virus is in sera taken from central Africa for immunogenetic study in 1959. Blood collected four years later suggests a similar low prevalence of the disease. However, by 1972 it was epidemic in Amin's Uganda – though it is Zaïre which is currently favourite as the source of the disease. There is, in that country, a form of simian AIDS suffered, presumably, by several primates though most often noted in green monkeys whose contacts with man are two: they bite farmers and men eat their raw brains. (The monkey whose raw brain is eaten, lightly dressed in soy and chilli oil, by the Chinese is a different beast.) Whether these are the means by which AIDS reached man is moot, but it *is* certain that heterosexual intercourse is its main vector in that continent. The attempts to trace the genealogy of the virus are diligently listed by Hancock and Carim: none of the researchers whose disparate routes are outlined seems to be setting about his task with the mad glee that informed Pangloss's attempt to discover the source of syphilis. None, also, seems to concern himself with the matter of cannibalism (which is how kuru was transmitted in Papua New Guinea). It is improbable that things are still as they were at the turn of the century when Reverend W. Holman Bentley wrote in *Pioneering On The Congo*: 'the whole wide country seemed to be given up to cannibalism'. But there are certainly well documented instances of a revival of the practice (out of gastronomic preference rather than ritual piety) during the chaotic years just before and after the Belgian secession, the years when, remember, the virus first appeared. It seems all too likely that some hapless anthropophage got some bad meat in his cooking can. The authors are dogged, a bit plodding, thorough, rarely prey to afflatus; their method tends to ape that of the researchers who are their secondary subject. Had the form of their book aped that of this extraordinarily mutating disease they would have written – well, something else. As it is they

have provided a catholic and intelligent survey that combines unexceptionable reportage with elucidation. Even sculpted lumps of fudge in posing pouches will be able to twig most of it; this is one for the aptly named layman.

Aids: The Deadly Epidemic by Graham Hancock & Enver Carim

1986

The Big One

Death possesses a synonymic attraction that is greater than that of anything save sex and drunkenness. Death invites more slang words, more euphemisms than all else apart from those two great leisure pursuits. This is remarkable for something which is supposed to be taboo: sure, euphemisms are evasions, but they're also solaces of a sort, literally happy modes of speech that mitigate our shock at someone else's material change – pass away, *disparaître* (which borders on solipsism, transferring the fact of death to those who *witness* the disappearance. The dead do disappear from our view and society, and initially we're often unable to take on board the truth that the flit they've done is eternal). The slang words are, characteristically, curt and hostile – expressions like 'own goal' which is boy in blue for suicide or 'snuff it' or 'Roman candle' which is squaddie for parachute failure are not the ones we use when bereavement touches us but they are very likely as evasive as the more patent euphemisms, they form a functional rather than a decorative barrier between it and us, between death and our contemplation of it. The conventionalized representations of (mostly violent) death that are hourly norms on telly have the same effect; the basely stylized and the histrionically fake are beards for the real thing. They fool us, with our connivance, into believing that we are bravely familiar with death, that we can face it. The American writer Michael Lesy's harrowing and unflagging book *The Forbidden Zone* is a measure of the extent of our self delusion and of our smugly wrong conviction that the taboo is bust. It is shocking in many ways, not least because it emphasizes the meretricious cheapness of the minds that contrive pulp deaths and turn

them into an entertainment; Mr Lesy doesn't achieve this through raw comparison but by treating real death head-on, with wonder and sobriety, with a speculative curiosity that keeps well this side of fancy.

Lesy's nine chapters are devoted to homicide policemen, pathologists, counsellors of AIDS sufferers (whom a grief operative insists be called PWAs – Persons With Aids), undertakers, a homicidal 'warrior'. He visits the scene of a murder, hangs out on death row. For relief from human mortality he goes to a slaughterhouse, is instructed by a rabbi who is a *shochet*, a ritual slaughterer. His method is both reportorial and autobiographical. It's a world away from the formulaic system called objective reporting. His presence is always felt. He never stands back; rather he records, with a sometimes ingenuous candour, how this fearful progress is touching him. Mostly it touches him the way you'd expect, badly. Friends die, overexposure to human meat and to a gallery of head cases persuades him that death is on him, that his impertinent rashness in wanting to get this close is being repaid by having him act like a vector of death. It's not just that he sees too much – that can be said of all of his subjects too – but that, unlike them, he has no capacity for acceptance: custom has removed the abnormality of their jobs from those who actually work with the dead and the soon to be dead (when you've been removing people's spleens for long enough it gets to be no more or less than any other job). But Mr Lesy's job is to question everything, to discern meanings, and this obviates being able to acquiesce; the very quality that enables his subjects to live with themselves is the one he can't allow himself. His subjects, no matter how unlike each other they may otherwise be, have all devised schemes of inurement to their jobs and to themselves doing those jobs. Many are unselfconscious and thus comic, others are repositories of cracker-barrel saws, others have got DIY philosophies and loopy mystic programmes. Each, in his way, is contaminated by the very defensive work that he's constructed to keep the actual at bay.

The technicalities of evisceration, of the operation of electric

chairs, of shooting a steer, of taking off a man's head with a kukri are graphically written up. It's through his relentless concentration on surfaces, on the physical, on tics and minute detail that Lesy builds so concrete a picture of the face of the unknowable. The milieus he re-creates are eerily mundane and prone to nurture superstition. While Lesy tries to keep himself stuck in the material universe his collocutors are forever clocking creatures from other planets, telling ghost stories (that they believe in), witnessing synchronous weirdnesses. Maybe this is what the omnipresence of death does. Maybe such fruitcakes gravitate towards the dead and the dying. Either way those in the death industry tend to prolixity and the author's deftness in suggesting this (and what he had to put up with) whilst not inflicting it on his audience is admirable. The result is something that is tight, dense, composed with harsh grace and revelatory of every question save the big one – it's actually a wonder that Lesy, who is nothing if not persistent, failed to find one of those fortunates who has suffered a post-mortal experience and has a tale to tell. The only such fortunate here has nothing to say – 'I was way up over my house, and I saw my wife and one of my sons bending over me' – which is odd given his lack of reticence in describing the deaths he has inflicted on others.

The Forbidden Zone by Michael Lesy

1988

Geeks and Things

Dr Gonzalez-Crussi is a Chicago pathologist and Sunday metaphysician. His *Notes of an Anatomist* (same publisher, last year) is a collection of morbidly limpid essays on human anomalies, the strangeness of the body, violence against children etc.; in it he exhibited a flashily supple prose, a massive and catholic reading habit (which is not quite the same thing as learning) but remained, *au fond*, a man with a scalpel who knows what it is to cut open an embryo. It was his professed discipline that coloured his essays, no matter what else he brought to them. This time round it is the hobbyist who's in the ascendant; the balance within him has shifted, the avid reader has usurped the keyboard with the consequence that the special voice has to compete with a chorus of echoes, echoes that contrive to contaminate the special voice itself and force it into coy archaism and prolixity. Further, the sheer weight of allusion and quotation mitigates the shapeliness of the essays, their frames are invariably masked by fubsy embonpoints. Arguments are so subsumed by data that one is left with nothing but data: the effect is like that of an encyclopaedia whose entries have been subjected to skilful but pointless elisions and random juxtapositions. The book is best approached as a photo-free version of one of those 'popular' large-format jobs with a title like *A Directory of Incredibly Weird Phenomena*.

And much that he relates is incredibly weird, it's the sort of stuff that makes good incidental material in novels by Pynchon and his ilk: alcoholic vagrants electrocuted by urinating on to live subway tracks; in forty per cent of deaths when food 'goes down the wrong way' the food is either a hot dog or a candy, a statistic lifted from a paper called *Childhood Asphyxiation by*

Food: A National Analysis and Overview – one assumes that the agent of choking would be quite different in Britain or Russia; the efforts of Lazzaro Spallanzani (1729–99) to equip male frogs with chastity belts; the contention that Fuseli's *The Nightmare* is a representation of the condition called sleep apnea which causes asphyxiation in the sleeper – I'd say that it is a representation of the sort of dream you cop if, as Fuseli did, you eat raw pork in order to promote 'subject material'; the story of a woman who exposes her shrivelled cancerous breast to a young suitor to deter him; an inventory of objects recovered, *post mortem*, from stomachs; Thomas Hobbes's premature birth provoked by his mother's fear of the Spanish Armada; a man whose hernial sac contained a perfectly formed uterus and Fallopian tubes . . .

Now, all this is jolly entertaining gen; here's a digest that will delight those who scout through organs such as the *BMJ* for articles entitled 'Penile Injuries From Vacuum Cleaners' and so on. What is troubling is the very thing that Dr Gonzalez-Crussi must forever be thankful for, i.e. the fact that he appears to remain so normal (so humane, so liberal, so decent) a man when his preoccupations (perverse, deathly, sick as a parrot choking on its own vomit) are so abnormal. He zealously emphasizes the gulf, the distance, that exists between himself and his material; he concerns himself too much with protesting his brain-cred. It would be good to see him come out (as no one says any more), to reveal himself in the medium that begs for him. He need not even use his own name: another doctor, H-P Destouches turned himself into L-F Celine, to signal (if ultimately tragic) effect. The thing is, no one expects writers of fiction to be decent human beings.

Three Forms of Sudden Death by F Gonzalez-Crussi

1987

Brideshead Improved

Kingsley Amis got it right when he described *Brideshead* as 'lush and arid'. He doesn't always get it right. He described Vladimir Nabokov's prose as 'émigré purple' and on another occasion said that the incomparable Russian could not write English. Incomparable? There is actually a marked affinity between Nabokov and Evelyn Waugh. The one was an aristocrat (albeit dispossessed) and the other had a marked fondness for and aspiration towards the aristocracy (not quite the same thing, but you see what I mean). Both were possessed of a comic genius. Both, according to J-P Sartre in his introduction to Nathalie Sarrauté's *Portrait Of A Man Unknown*, aimed 'to make use of the novel in order to challenge the novel, to destroy it before our very eyes while seeming to construct it'. Sartre of course could write a lot of balls, but again you can see what he means: *Despair, Laughter In The Dark, King, Queen, Knave* and *Vile Bodies, A Handful Of Dust, Scoop*. These are novels full of deceits; the characters are cartoons; the authors are intrusive puppet masters; the humour is savage, black, lacking charity; the emotions are brutal; their prose is hard and glittering; there is no 'psychology' – nothing is explained, everything just happens. The reader is a 'participant' as he is in the films of Hitchcock. And there is a further correspondence between these two marvellous writers.

Attempts to render their works as film, TV, theatre and so on have been largely unsuccessful. Think of Tony Richardson's ghastly film of *Laughter In The Dark* and of his equally ghastly film of *The Loved One*, of the wretched Swinging Londonish *Decline And Fall*, of a silly telly *Vile Bodies*, all bright-young-thingery. There was a passable version by the BBC of *Put Out*

More Flags – I think there was, anyway. I am *sure* there was a version of *Scoop*, where some cretin cast Harry Worth as Boot.

There was also the flop stage version, by Albee, of *Lolita*; Fassbinder and Stoppard's *Despair* (which, since the book depends on the reader not being able to *see* that the narrator is lying or deluding himself, was hardly ideal material); a gimmicky play of *The Ordeal Of Gilbert Pinfold*.

Kubrick's film of *Lolita* was admirable (script by the author) but it was a *fragment*. Skolimowski's film of *King, Queen, Knave* caught the right balance between Polanski and Jerry Lewis. And the BBC did Waugh's *Sword Of Honour* trilogy quite adequately. But the record is generally poor. Proof of the rectitude of the notion that only bad novels make good films, that a novel if it is any good at all has a voice that may not be transferred or approximated to on a screen of any size.

Lush and arid – *Brideshead* is not one of Waugh's better efforts. Those qualities that Sartre noted are absent. Waugh shuns the comic conventions and narrative jolts that characterized his early work. The prose is indeed lush, overweight; there is a lot of brand-name snobbery and food-porn of the Bernard Levin sort; things are explained, filled out. It is arid in the way that kitsch is arid – the opulence of the style is unmatched by the material which is sometimes trite (or made trite by that style). The resort to cliché is often embarrassing: 'It was as though a deed of conveyance of her narrow loins had been drawn and sealed. I was making my first entry as freeholder of a property I would enjoy and develop at leisure.' There's a good deal of this – coy, crude, distended. And one could all too easily see the book turned into another costume epic. Lavish this, lavish that. *Jeunesse dorée*, a cornucopia of period colour, all the trappings of the nostalgia industry, a protracted soft focus advertisement – all props and no core.

The marvel of this adaptation is that it is a vast improvement on the novel, whilst remaining pretty faithful to it. John Mortimer's script retains much of the dialogue (the best bit of the book) and the narrator/protagonist's interior monologue which is rendered as a voice-over is no longer embarrassing – it is distilled to its explanatory and *comic* essentials. What Mr

Mortimer has done splendidly is to heighten the comedy and so provide a sound counterpoint to the more sober passages. Everything, indeed, has been sharpened. I don't for a moment mean to suggest though that this is an *interpretation*; it is not. It simply shows what the book might have been had a zealous editor had more of a hand in it.

Visually it is rich, not lush. The subjects of the tableaux are rich; the way in which they are filmed is straightforward, no artiness (although there is a framed photograph of Evelyn Waugh in Mr Samgrass's study. Knowing stuff). In a moment, the actors. The secondary stars are the buildings and their interiors – and their architects: Vanbrugh, Hawksmoor, Wren, 'Anglo' Jackson, Sir Ernest George etc. I can think of no TV drama that has made better use of fine English architecture or whose cameras have lingered more dotingly. Brideshead, as everyone – if they do not already know – will recognize, is represented by Castle Howard which is apt enough though the chapel is not Arts and Crafts.

All right. I hear you baying: What about the actors? Jeremy Irons as Charles Ryder, 'writer' of the memoirs that comprise the book, is excellent. He is in almost every scene – the 'eyes' though which the spectator sees the thing, and the protagonist too. The covert homosexuality of the relationship between Ryder and Sebastian Flyte is more directly hinted at than in the book. But it stays this side of consummation – no jars of Vaseline on show or anything like that. As Sebastian, the wonderful boy who turns into a remittance man and a drunk, Anthony Andrews is a revelation. He conveys, variously, vanity, weakness, real charm (not actor's charm), a capacity for self destruction and extremes of behaviour. And he can also make one believe – unlike, say, Robert Redford as Gatsby – why he is an object of hero worship and homosexual idolatry; he also has the knack of looking dissipated. Gielgud gets full marks for his turn as Ryder's thoroughly dotty father. Olivier, as ever, makes the unobvious appear obvious, a mark of his greatness. One can question Diana Quick's casting as Julia. Her face is not *quattrocento*, nor is she debby – not even oddball debby. No matter, Claire Bloom is thoroughly credible

as her mother. Some of the minor characters (the real monsters) are most memorably done. I particularly like John Grillo as Mr Samgrass, the creeping don, and Nickolas Grace as the roaring queen Anthony Blanche. My main quibble probably has something to do with the age I was when I first read the novel, 18. Ryder then seemed impossibly old, though he is only 38 when he imparts his memoirs to paper. He still seemed old for his age when I reread it recently. Here he – and the other characters – seem young; and this despite being portrayed by actors who in the initial episodes are 'playing young'. Sort it out for yourselves.

This is the first time that Waugh has been done full justice in another medium, justice in spite of himself you might think. One can now only wait for Messrs Mortimer and Sturridge (the director) to turn their attention to one of Nabokov's lesser efforts – *Ada* maybe, or *Bend Sinister*.

1982

Death of a Utopia

Here is a fat example of what's almost a genre – the betrayed liberal's stumble through the rubble of the better world he was brought up to expect. And in the rubble he finds, just as his father's generation found in the ruins of Essen and Berlin, the many holding their heads and wondering what went wrong, and the few getting on with it – selling their daughters for a packet of cigarettes, peddling camshafts, revelling in the potent forces of an untrammelled market.

The better world was born the year after the author, at Bretton Woods and Dumbarton Oaks – happy sylvan names, promising a dappled future, ogre-free and ordered: this was the world that for Mr Mortimer and his contemporaries, the titular children, was supposed to be the norm. Its disappearance, and the attrition of internationalism, and the breakdown of the multilateral systems that supported it add up to nothing less than the death of a quasi-utopian programme.

This subject is a big one, too big, apparently, for most of those who are portentously listed as this book's *dramatis personae*. Actually they are interviewees, and the book is the book of a telly series – a fact that it shamelessly neglects to dissemble. Its structure is determined by the stock telly convention of an opinionated narration with pertinent 'visuals' (gleaming shopping centres for economic recovery, festering bodies for central African tyranny) interspersed with talking heads that amplify and illustrate whatever case it is that's being argued. Fine: the problem is that many of the heads are not merely talking, they're in the throes of logorrhoea and it spatters all over the page. Those interviewed fall into two groups: a) the men who attempted to fashion the post-war

world, who believed in the IMF and the UN and who made them motor; b) Mr Mortimer's contemporaries who are now shaping up to take power or, in the case of Neil Kinnock, not take it. The star turn is Brian Urquhart, the former Under Secretary General of the UN.

This is not surprising, for Urquhart is the man who after being assaulted in the anthropophagic Elisabethville of 1961 sent a telegram that read 'Better beat than eat.' He is similarly pithy here and talks more sense than the overwhelming majority of his juniors put together. He avers that the UN was established to cope with a world that no longer existed, that of the early 30s, and he rues what he calls the 'national provincialism' of today's leaders. This trait, which is, if you like, the 'theoretically' sanctioned personal selfishness of the late 80s inflated to state size, forms an antagonistic bond between the most improbable countries and fosters a sort of International Darwinism, something that the more gungho free marketeers on display here positively relish; they *know* that financial prescriptions don't work.

They know that Aid goes to plenish the dictator's wife's wardrobe. They can see that just as the UN was strong on built-in obsolescence so were the resolutions and prospective effects of Bretton Woods pleaded in the House of Representatives as though they were Ezra Pound's crazily absurd reductions of Social Credit. They constantly evince a smug hermeticism that is graceless and slight beside Urquhart's grand and unpompous ability to discern patterns on a global scale. This hermeticism is not just the lot of the newish right however; it contaminates an entire generation of western politicians. Now, it may be that Mr Mortimer has manipulated his subjects or that he has succumbed to the temptation to edit their observations so that irrespective of party or persuasion they acquire a homogeneously strait vision, but I doubt both; they go for own goals without being pushed, these people. Their references, their enthusiasms, their influences are exclusively political; they are wittingly formed by politics and politics alone; they have rendered politics as yet another specialization; they are refugees from the wider civilization

into which they were born; they are frighteningly preoccupied with 'style' and packaging (witness the adulation of Castro and Kennedy); they form a caste apart and no matter how mutually belligerent they may be they have more in common with each other than with what Mr Mortimer calls 'ordinary people'. This is an epithet, like Toniben's 'ordinary working man' that usually smacks of laziness and patronization. But Mr Mortimer has, perhaps unbeknown to himself, got it right: these are not ordinary people, but nor are they *extra*ordinary. Rather they are super-ordinary. They are not leaders although they may be about to be *the* leaders. They are led. They are joiners. Their capacity for the retention and rehearsal of old, received and thieved ideas is wondrous.

You can ascribe this uniform narrowness to the informational overkill that television has prompted: the world is so rucksacked by facts that it's impossible to see the wood from the trees. Or you can ascribe it to the *zeitgeist* which is merely a way of recognizing man's inevitable tendency to copy and to adhere to a notional consensus out of fear and 'peer pressure', i.e. fear of one's peers, a grown up and grave hangover from the childish resolve not to be different. Or you can step up a notch, and shrug, and mutter that after a period of determinist Pelagianism the wheel is bound to turn towards free-form greed and self interest.

Whichever the case, Mr Mortimer has performed a selfless service – how wearisome it must have been to listen to these people! – in exposing the paucity of the mentation of his political coevals. He is modest enough not to state the glaringly implicit conclusions that politics has not attracted the better brains of his generation; that these better brains have settled for extra-governmental endeavours; that this collective abdication of the zippy cells – occasioned no doubt by their prescient perception that even a qualified utopia is bound to break – has been a failure of responsibility, of duty. They have no one but themselves to blame for having passed the fate of the western world (insofar as that world is divisible from the others which are now so close we can smell their breath) into the hands of presentation artistes and maquillage consultants.

Next time round Mr Mortimer should listen to the ventriloquists, not the dummies.

Roosevelt's Children by Edward Mortimer

1987

JFK Speaks

Since relinquishing the Presidency in 1968 John F. (Jack) Kennedy has fought paternity suits, acted as a counsellor to his brother Bobby (Robert) during *his* tenure of the Big One ('72–6), has fought the many slurs on his reputation, has made up with Peter Lawford (often), has published several volumes of self-vindication of his policies in S.E.Asia, Brazil, the Philippines and the Congo. He's now 68 and is as libidinous as ever: 'Show me some ass and the pain in my neck just seems to drift away.' Of his famous proclamation 'I am a Londoner' made from the steps of Chelsea Town Hall during his equally famous 'Flower-Route' People-Mingle of 1967 he says: 'I really meant every word.' Of the attempt on his life in Dallas in November, 1963 he jokes: 'Y'know, everyone can remember where they were that day. The guy was a gook, some commie pimp, a funny farmer – I can't even recall his name. But I didn't like the way Lyndon tried to fuck the hole in my neck in the plane on the way to hospital.' He is currently involved 'in an actively creative role' with the architect Philip Johnson's final-stage plans for a Kennedy Walhalla at Hyannis: 'I kinda like his wizzy post-modern sensibility . . . I guess I was the first post-modern president. I like the way he's going to make Mount Rushmore look like gnat sculpture – it feels right. It feels Kennedy.' Of Jackie he says: 'Well, we went our own ways. But we are still mutually respective.' 'Which,' said Bobby, who had just come in through the window and was removing his gloves after attending to some business, 'is more than you can say 'bout Ethel and me.' Jack shook with laughter till his chair shook so much that Bobby had to switch

on the stabilizers, saying: 'They don't make these Delanomobiles so taut as they used to.' Jack winked: 'It can be a bastard to push about, this one – can't it Bobs? It can be a real bastard, eh Bobs? Ha! Bobs's old back feels it now he's old.' 'Not so old as you, gimp,' said Bobby with a playfully fraternal toe-jab at Jack's eternally anaesthetized lower limbs – the result of a viral infection contracted after an afternoon spent going walkabout at Kaplan's Deli-Gym-Massage Loft on Telegraph Hill in the autumn of 1975. Bobby's tactical-reprisal saturation bombing of Tel Aviv was of course responsible for his losing the '76 election to Jimmy Carter. 'It was the right thing to do and it wasn't the right thing to do as we say in realpolitik seminar six at Kennedy College,' says Jack. 'Over-reaction? Only a sick self-pitying yid would say so. Where Bobby went wrong was with his timing. Didn' oo Bobs? If he'd waited till after the election to give the pastramis the wipe he'd have kept the seat warm for Teddy. Wouldn't oo Bobs?'

1986

Millie's Problem: A Film

PART ONE. 1969

In Part One MILLIE is 16 years old. Her accent is lower middle class Bournemouth, i.e. a bit akin to the urban burr of Southampton but with less 'Cockney' vowels. She is prettyish but evidently lacks the looks a model needs if she is to succeed. MILES is 18 years old, expensively if trashily dressed. He has no regional accent and comes from a 'higher' social class than MILLIE. Apart from MILES the only other characters without regional accents are NINA and the DOCTOR.

1. EXTERIOR. STREET. DAY.

The date 1969 is superimposed. A backstreet in Poole. Edwardian terraces. Some houses have signs outside advertising 'Live Bait', others advertise 'Boat Trips'. MILLIE is hurrying along the pavement, half walking, half running, agitated, late for work. She is dressed in miniskirt, maxicoat, thigh boots, tiny pullover that intermittently shows her midriff. The clothes look cheap. Her make-up is excessive, crude, stagey. She carries, with difficulty, a portfolio so large that she has to keep stopping to move it from one hand to the other. We see her in close up; the camera tracks beside her; we see her in long shot as she crosses the road and turns into another. She arrives on the pavement opposite a restaurant called NINA's CANTINA. She goes across the road and enters it.

2. INTERIOR. RESTAURANT. DAY.

The place is pastiche French, amateurish – SNCF posters, enamel signs, Ricard ashtrays, check tablecloths, junk shop

mirrors on the walls. Tables half laid ready for lunch. MILLIE enters from the street. Simultaneously NINA comes in from the kitchen with a high pile of plates. NINA is 30, hippyish, with long 'ethnic' skirt and no make-up.

MILLIE: I'm late

NINA: (resignedly) As ever

MILLIE: I tried – I . . .

NINA: No matter. I've got other . . . Freddy's (indicates kitchen with jerk of head) been speeding all night. Bastard made me . . . I forgot Juanita's birthday present . . . She hasn't *said* anything but . . . Ooh if I thought you'd clear it up properly I'd make a dramatic gesture with this lot (Indicates pile of plates). But you wouldn't so I won't.

MILLIE: (Putting down portfolio) Aren't you going to ask how I got on?

NINA: (Dumps plates on a table) Very well. How did it go?

MILLIE: (Inordinately proud) They said I got real potential. That's what he said – Aynsley. He's been in *Zeitgeist* and *Lens* an', er, *Chicky Miss* – very professional, he showed me. (She moves towards a mirror, arranges her hair, squints at herself.) He had a studio up in London, near Chelsea.

NINA: Tremendous (Without conviction)

MILLIE: (Pouting at herself) Yeh. He's only down here because of his lung. His partner's the chap that does all the Winter Gardens, Joey.

FREDDY, a forlorn wreck of about 30, unshaven with hugely frizzed hair and a filthy T shirt comes in from kitchen with his hand inside a chicken – it's like a glove – that's he's gutting.

NINA: Millie's met a man who says she has real potential.

MILLIE: Yeh.

FREDDY: Too much (His hand wriggles in the chicken)

MILLIE: And Joey, he thought so too (She starts to take off her coat)

NINA: Hey, hey – before you do that . . . Can you – it's Juanita's birthday . . .

FREDDY: (Concentrating on chicken) She wants a gomm

MILLIE: A what?

FREDDY: A *gomm*

MILLIE: (Wonders if she's being taken for a ride) What's that?
NINA: A gnome. That's what she called it (giggles)
FREDDY: Gomm, gomm (Stoned, mad)
MILLIE: You're such a Paul and Barry sometimes.
NINA: (Taking money from till) So if you . . . She's seen one . . . Oh, and a card – get her a card
MILLIE: How old is she?
NINA: (Gives money to Millie) Thirty-five? Six? She had Maria when she was sixteen so . . .
MILLIE: *Sixteen?* God . . .

3. INTERIOR. GARDEN CENTRE. DAY.
It is like a warehouse. Rows of pot plants, small trees, bird baths, benches, tables, sunbeds, statuary – 'classical' figures, swans, gnomes, putti. Also: little windmills, burnt-into-wood house nameplates etc. The floor is wet from frequent hosing. MILLIE and JUANITA are walking through the place. MILLIE is patently bored. JUANITA is excited. She is short, fat, with a moustache. She waddles resolutely, has on a mac and scarf. Two young men are in the warehouse: CARL, who is a rather meek employee of about 15 years old, and MILES. Though they both wear Wellington boots and have hoses and brushes MILES looks very much the boss's son and is telling Carl what to do. MILES is powerfully built, has clean long hair, is good looking and well spoken. MILES notices MILLIE and watches her without realizing – his appreciation of her is not exclusively lustful. He is amused by her attempts to get Juanita to hurry.
JUANITA: (Pointing with quiet triumph) Gomm.
MILLIE: (Stifling a laugh) Gomm
JUANITA: Lovely, no?
MILLIE: Yeh, it's all right
JUANITA: Oh and the lovely babies (inspecting a putto). Just like real. Cutie pie (They walk up and down lines of statues)
MILLIE: (Buttons up her maxicoat) Brrr
JUANITA: Hey look at this little gomm . . . cheeky little gent, no? (She tweaks the gnome's crutch) Make him wanna go boum boum

MILLIE: (Shows no interest in Juanita's scrutiny of the gnomes) Which d'you want then?

JUANITA: All so nice (She moves away from Millie who is leaning against a garden seat and picks up a putto that is foetally curled, save that its arms are tortuously contorted) Sweetie cuddles, oh. 'Ere you 'old 'im Millie. Come on (Millie shrugs and moves towards Juanita who foists the thing into Millie's arms)

MILLIE: (Holding it with distaste) It's creepy

JUANITA: Slimy from the water, that's all . . . Pretty

MILLIE: D'you want it then? (Her pose is suggestive of Virgin and Child)

MILES has approached them and addresses Millie with confidence and charm

MILES: Hullo. You're Millie Foale aren't you?

MILLIE: Yeh (quizzical)

MILES: Miles Seed – you were at Lindy Izzard's party weren't you?

MILLIE: 'Sright. Don't remember you.

MILES: (Slightly affronted) Oh . . . D'you want that?

MILLIE: (Wrinkles her nose as though it smells) Not sure. (To Juanita, who's casting around for other treats) Do we wan . . .

MILES: It's cast from a stillbirth appare . . .

MILLIE drops the statue in horror, with a sort of absent minded shock. It shatters on the concrete floor of the warehouse.

JUANITA: Oh poor poor baby

MILLIE: (Embarrassed at her clumsiness, bending to pick up the pieces) Sorry, I – oh (She cuts herself on a shard. To Miles) Look what you . . . What d'you want to go and say that for? Ow, stings . . .

MILES: (Genuinely concerned at her bleeding finger) We must bandage . . . (He shouts across the warehouse to CARL who's tending some plants) Hey Carl. Carl – get the first aid box. Quick. (He squats on his haunches to see her wound) Let's have a look . . .

MILLIE: Ow . . . Jesus – I got to take care of my hands

MILES: I'm really . . .

MILLIE: It's my livelihood

MILES: (Inspecting the cut) I'm so sorry (He takes her hand as he might a child's)

CARL has hurried across with the 'first aid box', a rusty lunch tin. JUANITA grabs it. CARL begins to pick up the broken putto.

JUANITA: Let me

MILES: (Standing, authoritative) It's all right. (He takes plasters from the tin. MILLIE hops from one foot to the other, wincing exaggeratedly) Here (She holds out her hand and he puts on the plaster) There – that should do the trick

JUANITA: (Looking at the shattered putto in Carl's arms) Gone for ever

MILES: We've hundreds more like it . . .

MILLIE: (Prissily sarcastic) We want one. Not hundreds . . . Do we want one?

JUANITA: (Shaking her head) Gomm.

4. INTERIOR. POODLE PARLOUR. NIGHT.

This is Millie's MOTHER'S business. The two of them live in a flat upstairs. The camera inspects the room as MILLIE and her MOTHER talk. There is a frosted glass window to the street with the words *Dandy Dogs* stencilled on it. All the apparatus of the trade is strewn about the salon which is predominantly crème de menthe formica. There are combs, clippers, hair dryers, bottles of lotions and dyes. On the walls are framed pictures of poodles and show dogs. MILLIE is sitting on a sort of padded table which is evidently used for dogs and her MOTHER is rebandaging her hand. MOTHER is 50ish and wears heavy make-up; her hair is massively teased and her flowerprint dress is worn above the knee. She wears an open nylon overall. A large sky blue poodle wanders about the room.

MOTHER: Well he didn't make much of a job of it . . . That should stem the flow

MILLIE: Said he'd take me out in his boat too

MOTHER: You bled on the Morphy Richards (She does the bandage with great fastidiousness – gauze, plaster, thread etc) I think I'm wasted sometimes. Trained to save lives . . .

and, well, look – turning dogs pink. (Pause) I tie a lovely tourniquet

MILLIE: Ow – careful Mum! This Aynsley – he said my hands were a special feature, like Fortunella Xavier's . . .

MOTHER: You got lovely hands . . . but you've got to have the will too. Drive as well as looks . . . There (She looks at the bandage with admiration) . . . Right – I must wipe the blood off that toaster.

5. INTERIOR. THE FLAT ABOVE THE POODLE PARLOUR. DAY.

Sunday morning. Living room. Twee, clean, tastefully kitsch – a poodle lamp, plates on the walls with dogs on them, china Alsatians; also non-canine gewgaws – souvenirs of continental holidays etc. The furniture is slightly out of date – angular G-plan. MILLIE is inspecting herself in the mirror above the fireplace. She is wearing much less make-up than we have seen her in hitherto and looks fresh and healthy. She is wearing shorts and a striped sailor top. The doorbell rings. She darts to the window and peers down to the street below. We see MILES's Austin Healey parked on the kerb. With swift deliberation MILLIE takes the phone off the hook, puts the receiver on a coffee table along with some unread popular newspapers. She arranges a desk diary and pen beside the phone. She goes out of the room and downstairs.

6. INTERIOR/EXTERIOR OF POODLE PARLOUR. DAY.

The front door beside the shop window, the hall and the stairs. MILLIE opens the door to MILES who is wearing crushed velvet trousers, patchwork boots with stacked heels, wide belt etc.

MILLIE: (Urgently) Come in. I'm on the phone. Won't be a sec (She turns and hurries upstairs)

MILES: (Bemusedly follows her in and waits at bottom of stairs) Right

MILLIE: (From top of stairs) Come up . . . don't hang about

7. INTERIOR. LIVING ROOM OF THE FLAT as 6. DAY.

MILLIE is already crouching at the coffee table with the phone in one hand and a pen in the other when MILES gets up the

stairs. He hardly enters the room, standing against the door jamb with studied casualness.

MILLIE: (On phone and with 'purposeful' gestures) Sorry 'bout that. (She pauses pretending to listen to the 'reply'). Who's the photographer? (Pause) Oh *really?* (Pause) No I haven't worked with him, I really admire him – 'specially his lighting. I thought those snaps of Lally Fairthorpe in *Minuit Mode* were something else (Pause. She smiles and shrugs at Miles as though to indicate the tiresomeness of business) Malaga? Sounds too much (Pause) All right, yeh. (Pause) Okay (Nods vigorously) All right, speak to you tomorrow then. (Pause) Yeh, ciao. (She puts down the phone. Makes note in diary. She claps her hands and gives a little whoop and addresses Miles) Great eh? *Tomorrow* want me for a big spread – working with Brook Vandenvell

MILES: Oh

MILLIE: (Registering momentarily that he is not impressed) Brook Vandenvell – he does the album covers. He did the new Eucalyptus Albino one

MILES: Oh – well that's good

MILLIE: Don't think I'll take it though

MILES: (Taken aback by all this) Ah

MILLIE: No. He crucifies his models. He's notorious. Didn't you know?

MILES: Nope

MILLIE: Thought everyone knew. Common knowledge among the girls it is. Donna Cunningham said she'd never work with him again.

MILES shrugs.

8. EXTERIOR. POOLE TO SANDBANKS ROAD BESIDE POOLE HARBOUR. MILES'S CAR. DAY.

MILES drives recklessly. MILLIE is exhilarated. But she keeps cool as though used to such things – she keeps running her hands through her hair. It is a fine sunny day. The masts of yachts make pinging noises just off the road to the right. There is much activity on the water. On the left of the road are large

detached houses of c1900–1920 – they can be discerned between the pines on the slopes of Canford Cliffs.

MILES: (Points up to Canford Cliffs) That's where I live. Up there. You can't quite see it.

MILLIE: Why don't you keep your boat here then?

MILES: Did. But Mal, the guy that's been working on it . . . He had a spot of trouble with this chick . . . so, you know, he keeps himself scarce

9. EXTERIOR. STUDLAND TO SWANAGE ROAD. MILES'S CAR. DAY.

MILLIE: I came over Swanage last week. Bout a job. They want to put me on the cover of the official guide. The *cover*. (Proudly) Saw the Director of Leisure.

MILES: Old Beamer Wilkins? What a nose eh? You ought to get my Dad to have a word in his ear – we supplied him with six dozen bird baths last year – very competitive price. Popular with man and chaffinch alike, Beamer.

We watch as the car accelerates along the road across the heath and disappears into the distance. Car tape plays The Doors' 'Strange Days'.

10. EXTERIOR. SEA OFF ST ALDHELM'S HEAD. MILES'S MOTOR BOAT. DAY.

The boat is travelling fast parallel with the cliffs. We see it from a distance, leaving a wake behind it. Close up we see MILES at the wheel with MILLIE behind him with her arms round his neck. They are both in swimsuits. MILLIE has a bikini, MILES a cock-sock. He is tanned and very muscular and clearly likes showing off his body; they have to shout to make themselves heard.

MILES: Great, eh?

MILLIE: Not bad

MILES: What?

MILLIE: Said, not bad

MILES: What d'you mean, *not bad*. There isn't another boat this side of Spithead that shifts like this. This is the works. Corsair engine.

11. EXTERIOR. SEA OFF WORBARROW. MILES'S BOAT. DAY.

The boat is still, bobbing about. Cliffs behind it. MILLIE is drinking red wine from a bottle. MILES is leaning back with his bottom and hands on the edge of the boat stroking MILLIE'S thigh with his foot and at the same time admiring his torso. Then he starts to kiss her legs. She goes on drinking. He moves towards her, keeping a good balance, and they kiss enthusiastically. He takes off her bikini top and kisses her breasts. While he is doing so she picks up her wine bottle and drinks more with self conscious wantonness. He tries to take off her bikini bottom but she pushes him away with the bottle and wriggles out of his reach, awkwardly.

MILLIE: No, no Miles (She is now in the bottom of the boat in a rather undignified position)

MILES: I thought you . . .

MILLIE: I will – but not here. What would the tourists think?

MILES: Brighten their dismal lives. (He appears unconcerned at the rebuff and moves away to the edge of the boat where he sits and flexes his muscles as though taking as much interest in himself as in her. He puts his cupped hands into the sea and pours water over himself, rubbing it in with slow caressing movements. He looks at Millie who is watching him through half closed eyes) Dip? (He smiles secretively then does a formal and rather stately backward roll into the sea. It looks like a vanishing trick.)

12. INTERIOR. MILES'S BEDROOM IN HIS PARENTS HOUSE. NIGHT.

The house is 1920s grand picturesque. There is plenty of panelling. The windows have leaded lights. The rooms are capacious. There are some mock beams. The place is patently opulent. MILES'S room is large and combines his parents' taste in Jacobethan furniture with teenage stuff of his own – stacks of records, paperbacks, tennis rackets, chest expanders. The Velvet Underground's 'Here She Comes Now' is playing on the record player. MILLIE and MILES are on his bed almost undressed, making love. When the record comes to its end the

noise of slamming doors is heard from downstairs. MILES disengages himself with alacrity.

MILES: What was that? . . . There's someone in the house.

He gets off the bed, pulls on his crushed velvet trousers, struggles into his patchwork boots, takes down a decorative kukri from the wall and, brandishing it, creeps out of the door. MILLIE, who is wearing her sailing shorts and nothing else, rolls over disconsolately and looks angrily at the door MILES has gone out of. On a shelf beside the bed is a photocube with pictures of MILES at different ages. MILLIE picks it up and looks at the various photos. One of them shows MILES at the age of 4 or 5, and she stares at it fixatedly. We see it in increasing close up – the camera sways a bit as it comes to rest on it so the eyes 'follow' the viewer. MILLIE puts the cube on her tummy and looks down her chin at this particular photo. From downstairs we hear voices and MILES'S mother RAE singing drunkenly.

RAE: All the nice girls love a candle, all the nice girls love a wick . . .

MILES: (Darting back into room) Christ, it's Mum and Dad

MILLIE: (Doesn't move) Thought you said they were going to be out till . . .

MILES picks up her sailor top and throws it to her.

MILES: Put your things on. Here

MILLIE: Ssstt . . . I was enjoying that (She stretches and tries to pull him back on to the bed. He shakes her off)

MILES: They'll go funny farm if . . . *Quick*, Millie

MILLIE gets off the bed and starts to dress, giving him a dirty look. MILES'S father KEN can be heard. He is fifty-ish, a bit hearty, a bit harassed.

KEN: (From downstairs) Miles! . . . Are you in? Miles?

RAE: Nice and greasy, goes in easy (Her singing is persistent but we only pick up odd phrases)

MILES: Just coming Dad (He puts his head round the door, doing up his shirt the while) We were just listening to some sounds . . .

KEN: (Closer) Your mother disgraced herself (Saying this for Rae too) . . . Did a George Brown . . .

MILLIE has just got her clothes on by the time he pushes past MILES into the room

KEN: Heaven knows how much trade this performance is going to have cost us (He sees Millie) . . . Oh . . . Pardon my . . .

MILES: This is Millie, Dad . . . We were just going down to Madhatters

MILLIE: Pleased to meet you

KEN: Ah yes (He is bemused rather than angry at Millie's presence)

13. EXTERIOR/INTERIOR. MILES'S CAR ON A SUBURBAN ROAD. NIGHT.

We see the car travelling fast along a road lined with rhododendrons and pines. Inside the car we see MILLIE looking disagreeable.

MILLIE: We really going to Madhatters?

MILES: What do you think?

MILLIE leans over and kisses him. MILES looks rather smug.

14. INTERIOR. GARDEN CENTRE. NIGHT.

The place is in darkness. We hear but do not see MILES and MILLIE initially. There is a certain amount of knocking into things.

MILLIE: Can't see an effing . . .

MILES: Just stand still – I'll find the lights (He bangs into something)

When the lights go on we see them in long shot, small figures in the vastness of the warehouse. MILLIE looks about her, blinking

MILLIE: Be like performing in Wembley Stadium (She giggles)

MILES walks from the light switches, kisses her lightly, then disappears into a sort of prefab office. MILLIE wanders about looking at plants and so on. The Rolling Stones record 'Under My Thumb' comes on, very loud and echoing. MILES emerges from the office with a portable tape recorder, a bottle of whisky and a pair of chipped coffee mugs. He waves the bottle.

MILES: In case of emergencies

MILLIE dances, lasciviously as though offering herself to him, among the garden ornaments. MILES joins in. After a while they start to undress each other. They lower themselves on to a garden sofa among the ranks of putti. So when they are lying down they are overlooked by all the putti, who are shown 'watching' their lovemaking.

MILLIE: (Wriggling into a comfortable position beneath MILES) At last – congratulations.

15. INTERIOR. LIVING ROOM OF MILES'S PARENTS' HOUSE. EARLY EVENING.

The room is expensively furnished, large, neat – good quality repro furniture, coffee table and books, middlebrow paintings, neo Georgian drinks cabinet, tasteful China gewgaws etc. It is all in marked contrast to the straitened gentility of MILLIE'S home. MILES and MILLIE are together on a sofa – she is dressed in jeans and a fisherman's pullover, he is wearing a flowery shirt, satin trousers and has no shoes on. He is drawing the rough elevation of a yacht. She watches. There are empty tea cups on the floor beside them, there is an air of familiar domesticity about them.

MILES: That's what I want – 't'd be amazing . . .

MILLIE: (Inspecting drawing) 'S ever so luxurious

MILES: Yeh – but it'd shift. I went on one like it at La Rochelle

MILLIE: Where?

MILES: West of France – it was owned by this woman. She took a bit of a fancy to me

MILLIE: (Reprovingly) Oh, did she

MILES: *Millie* – I was only twelve

MILLIE: (Pert) You said you were very mature for your age

MILES: Yeh, but not that . . . Ooh you're . . .

MILLIE: I'm just fussy about where you've been sweetie (She snuggles up to him as Ken comes in and doesn't move)

KEN: Evening, crew

MILES: Dad

MILLIE: 'Ello Mr Seed

KEN: (Going to drinks cabinet) What a day – you two need stiffeners (Pours himself whisky) Millie?

MILLIE: I won't thanks ever so

KEN: What abou . . . Oh before I forget. I had a word with Wilkins over at Swanage

MILLIE: (Sits up, excited) Oh – and . . .

KEN: (Shrugs) Well – 'fraid it doesn't look too hopeful to be honest. Blathering on about wanting a more natural look . . .

MILES (Ingratiatingly to Millie) What a Paul and Barry. (He tightens his arm around her consolingly)

16. EXTERIOR. STREET OUTSIDE NINA'S CANTINA. DAY.

MILLIE crosses the road towards the restaurant as in Scene 1. She is wearing the same maxicoat, but now has on trousers and a scarf. She walks slowly towards the restaurant, preoccupied, biting her lower lip.

17. INTERIOR. NINA'S CANTINA. DAY.

MILLIE enters with low key theatricality, expecting to be looked at by NINA who is polishing glasses and putting them on the tables. NINA is humming contentedly. Her son CHARLIE, a petulant and precocious ten year old, is firing matchsticks from a toy cannon at a construction of sugar cubes on a corner table. MILLIE pauses when she has shut the door behind her, she speaks portentously.

MILLIE: I'm late

NINA: Hi love (cheery, goes on humming)

MILLIE: (Standing absolutely still by the door) I'm *late*

NINA: (Oblivious to her tone) You're . . . you're not. You're quite early – for you.

MILLIE: I'm pregnant

CHARLIE'S cannon knocks over the sugar lumps

NINA: Mil . . . you're . . . Oh heavens . . . God, what are you . . . ? Oh you poor love (She puts down the glass in her hand and goes to MILLIE, puts her arm around her)

MILLIE: (Shrugs Nina away) It's all right (It evidently isn't) It's all taken care of

NINA: What do you mean? (Fearing the worst)

MILLIE: I've been to the clinic. They're arranging it. It's all taken care of . . .

NINA: *What?* An abor . . . *Millie,* Millie. Love. Think, think . . . You're . . . Think what you're doi . . . If I'd had an abortion I wouldn't have Charlie

FREDDY staggers in from the kitchen with a plate that he puts in front of CHARLIE

MILLIE: (vacantly) I don't want a Charlie

FREDDY: (Oblivious) Roes on toast Sir (To Charlie who is scrutinizing Millie)

NINA: What does . . . thingumybob say?

MILLIE: I haven't told thingumybob

NINA: (Incredulous) You haven't – Millie, what's the matter with you? (Millie, who hasn't moved from the door, starts to unfurl her scarf) Millie – you can't do this

CHARLIE: (With his mouth full of roes on toast) Course she can. It's my good luck you didn't Nina – but Millie can. Can't you Millie – you can get yourself hoovered

NINA looks sharply at CHARLIE who tucks into another mouthful

NINA: Don't you dare say such things

MILLIE: 'S all right . . . it's true

NINA: You'll regret it. Do you know that (Schoolmarmish)

MILLIE: (Moves past her to hang up her scarf and take off her coat. She speaks in a casual matter of fact way, as though about someone other than herself) I'd have stretch-marks . . . go all saggy. Be okay if I was a typist – wouldn't matter

NINA: Millie

MILLIE: (Hanging up her coat) 'Slike 'avin an eel with spurs inside you. It's a parasite. (Nina is incredulous) I mean it's a life sentence

JUANITA comes in from the kitchen with a rubbish bag and is puzzled by NINA's beginning to shout

NINA: You have no bloody idea. How dare you . . . (to Juanita who's gaping) Millie's just announced she's pregnant and she's going to . . .

JUANITA: (Face changes to huge generous smile) Millie! Wonderful. Ah Millie, Millie (She waddles to hug her) I bet you want a boy. Oh Millie, lovely cuddly little boy.

18. EXTERIOR. POOLE QUAY. MILES'S CAR WITH HOOD UP. LATE AFTERNOON.

The car is parked, its tail to the Harbour, Purbeck in the distance. We see MILES and MILLIE from the outside and so realize that they are talking animatedly, and have been for some while, but can't hear what's being said. The camera closes in on the car and we see them from in front and above (the hood can be removed). MILES is in the driver's seat and seems as if he's in a state of shock – all his usual smoothness has gone. MILLIE *looks* absolutely resolute.

MILES: We've got *plenty* of . . . (He sounds as though he's repeating himself for the umpteenth time) My Dad's well off . . . We'd be okay, honestly . . . (Millie stares at him with scorn) . . . It's mine as well

MILLIE: (Laughs) Get you – Family Man (Sneers) . . . Know what it'd . . . All bloody drudge . . . Drudge, drudge . . . I saw my Mum – she'd have had her own nursing home by now, not a bleeding dog . . . Oh no. *No*, no, no

MILES: What's happening to . . .

MILLIE: Just piddle off (She opens the door, gets out with more speed than grace, and strides away, along the bleak quayside with its cranes and warehouses)

MILES: (Gets out, trips and stumbles on his high heeled boots) Millie, Millie.

We see MILLIE from his point of view, walking away. She makes a dismissive gesture as though flicking a fly from her shoulder. She doesn't turn around. Then we see her face, which is begrutten – swollen with the effort of holding back tears, contorted and anguished.

19. INTERIOR. MILLIE'S BEDROOM. EARLY MORNING.

It is a small, mean room, only slightly cheered up by posters of Brian Jones, Jim Morrison, Che Guevara, Jimi Hendrix.

There are also cut-out pictures from teenage fashion magazines on the walls. The photocube containing pictures of MILES is on the dressing table. MILLIE sits at the dressing table, making up and talking to herself as though being interviewed.

MILLIE: Eventually, yes, I'd like to break into films . . . ('Listens' to interviewer) . . . Only if it's valid in the context of the script . . . (Listens) No – I don't think anything can match the thrill of seeing yourself on the cover of *Zeitgeist* or *Buzz* – (Listens) . . . Well I'm heavily into restaurants where you can be yourself, and my favourite is Shark's Tooth – grenadine, Fundador, Tia Maria and ginger ale. It's Emma Roxby's favourite too . . . (Listens) . . . Progressive sounds, Aquarians, powerboats . . . (Listens) I'm not against them but I think it's up to the individual . . . (Listens) Well there is but I'm not going to say anything about him I'm afraid . . . (Listens) . . . Well of course I'd like them but not until I'm much older, twenty-two or three . . . (Listens) . . . Oh a boy and a girl . . . (Listens) . . . Oh modern informal ones – Saffron for the girl and Sky for the boy (She starts to gag. She grimaces and hurries out of the room)

20. INTERIOR. UPSTAIRS LANDING OF MILLIE'S MOTHER'S HOUSE. EARLY MORNING.

We see the lavatory door. Little enamel figures stuck on it side by side with the legends Señoritas and Caballeros. An eau de nil poodle sits guard. From within we hear noises of MILLIE being sick. The phone is ringing. When it stops ringing we hear MOTHER'S voice downstairs.

MOTHER: Millie . . . Millie (She yells). Phone. (More sounds of Millie being sick) Millie. (The voice gets closer as she begins to ascend the stairs) There's the phone for . . .

MILLIE: (Screeches) Tell him I'm not in

MOTHER: (Half way up stairs) It's not *him*. You all right in there?

MILLIE: I still got this bad tummy Mum

MOTHER: I had this Bedlington in yesterday for a shampoo – he had a terrible tummy, horrible breath (The lavatory

flushes. MILLIE appears looking shaken despite her heavy make-up) It's someone called Aynsley.

21. INTERIOR. MILLIE'S MOTHER'S SITTING ROOM. EARLY MORNING.

MILLIE is listening to AYNSLEY speaking to her on the phone. She is standing, nodding vigorously. Two poodles, eau de nil and sky blue, sit watching her. Pop music radio plays in the kitchen

MILLIE: I'll just have to check if that's . . . if I'm free that day. (Puts hand over mouthpiece. Hunches shoulders with excitement) Hullo, Aynsley – that looks fine. (Listens) Sure – well it'll be valuable experience, challenge. (Listens) Right you are. (Listens) Okay. Speak to you soon. And thanks. (She puts down the phone. Huge smile. Claps her hands) Mum, Mum! Guess what (Going to door of room)

22. INTERIOR. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM. DAY.

A RECEPTIONIST is at her desk spraying Flit around her. From outside can be heard the chant of NUPE pickets 'Care for the caring. A wage for welfare.' Their placards and banners are visible as moving shapes through frosted glass windows. MILLIE stands numbly at these blind windows watching the torpid dance of banners. Her suitcase and her large portfolio are on one of a row of stacking chairs. She is wearing her maxicoat and trousers and looks blooming, full of colour. The chanting of the pickets is aggressive though ragged. A harassed ADMINISTRATOR, a youngish Scotsman, comes in and addresses the RECEPTIONIST, a woman in her 30s, who goes on spraying.

ADMINISTRATOR: (Indicating pickets through window) I don't know. Jesus. I said: we've got to get round the table. I told em. (Millie turns lethargically from the window to listen) Can't blame em I suppose. (He pauses and clicks his tongue in his teeth. Then he starts to sort through a pile of bumf on the desk) What have we got?

RECEPTIONIST: (Almost a whisper, with a furtive nod in Millie's direction) There's one termination

ADMINISTRATOR: Oh Lord (Sighs, low voice) You'd better, ah,

tell her she's going to have to forgo her right to choose, as they say

RECEPTIONIST: Wilco and roger

ADMINISTRATOR: Much more of this and I'll begin to regret my mother didn't have the right too. I dunno – I'd better go and call District. If Martin Luther King out there wants to talk tell him I'll be in the you know where. (He casts a glance at Millie and goes out. The Receptionist puts down her Flit, arranges the papers on her desk, clears her throat and addresses Millie)

RECEPTIONIST: Miss Foale

MILLIE, who has heard what was said, stares at her mutely. She now has her back to the frosted glass window and the swirling of the banners has become more agitated and the chanting louder. She stands forlorn and puzzled against this sort of shadow play backdrop.

23. INTERIOR. DOCTOR'S OFFICE. DAY.

The chanting from outside is hardly audible in here. It is a small office with no personal touches save two framed pictures of children on the desk. The DOCTOR is about 35, tired looking, ill-shaven. In contrast to him MILLIE looks the very picture of health. She also looks vaguely mystified by what has now overtaken her. They face each other across the desk. The doctor toys with a half eaten sandwich.

DOCTOR: You can't (Shrugs) legislate for this sort of eventuality . . . Not in a free society

MILLIE: No

DOCTOR: I've had a quick shufti – we can guarantee you the eighteenth, whatever this lot are up to. They can sing and dance all they like we've got revised staffing from that week

MILLIE: *Eighteenth.* (Pause) Of December? 'Salmost a month. I'll be more than . . .

DOCTOR: (Firm) There's no danger, nothing to be afraid of. (Smiles with conviction. Takes a bite of his sandwich)

24. INTERIOR. GARDEN CENTRE. NIGHT.

This is a dream, or an hallucination provoked by anaesthetic. The warehouse is lit so that its walls are indiscernible – it

might be infinite. The light there is bright but foggy. There are sounds of breathing, of beating hearts. MILLIE walks naked through the place. Her hair is wet. Both her body and her hair shine with the strange light. The camera follows from behind, moving at inconstant speed and zooming out as it closes in on her and zooming in as it lags away thus constantly distorting the perspective but unemphatically. When MILLIE reaches the place where the putti were we see that they have been replaced by BABIES. The BABIES are all wearing wigs the colours of dyed dogs – eau de nil and sky blue. And their limbs are spattered with blood. They are crawling about or lying on their backs, naked and apparently wounded. Some of them have blood coming from their mouths. MILLIE looks down on the babies and the frame is full of them.

25. INTERIOR. HOSPITAL WARD. DAY.

It is glaringly lit. MILLIE is in a bed with a screen round it wearing a hospital nightdress. The screen reflects the lights. The noises of breath and beating hearts from the previous scene continue. MILLIE wriggles in a troubled daze, scrabbles around the bedclothes. She speaks in a desperate mumble

MILLIE: Where . . . where are you (Fighting with the bedclothes)

A NURSE puts her head round the side of the screen

NURSE: How are we?

MILLIE: (Gapes at her, says nothing for a while) Where is he?

NURSE: (Moves to her, plumps pillow) There there

MILLIE: (Shrieks) *Where?* You haven't hurt him? (Drowsy again)

NURSE: It's all right

MILLIE: Yeh . . .'sall right . . . I'll find him. Won't I? (She turns over closing her eyes and smiling)

26. INTERIOR. SANTA'S DEN IN A DEPARTMENT STORE. DAY.

The place is crammed – there are photographic lights everywhere. Also piles of gift-wrapped boxes, a huge Christmas

tree, lots of tinsel, fairy lights, streamers, a sleigh and cut-out reindeers. AYNSLEY the photographer is trying to get a shot of SANTA handing a present to a four year old called MAXINE. MILLIE is 'playing' Maxine's mother and is meant to be looking on with maternal pride, fondness etc. MILLIE is in a dreadful state – washed out, her hair straggly, her make-up messily applied. She is also unable to strike the right facial expression. AYNSLEY is getting frustrated by her incompetence. There is a certain tension in this claustrophobic set up. MILLIE wears a royal blue overcoat both too bright and too 'old' for her.

AYNSLEY: Millie, love – she is your child, you are glad Father Christmas has a nice gift for her – so fucking *look* glad.

MILLIE: (Fiddling with her hair) Sorry, sorry. I know

AYNSLEY: Right. Now hold that (The three strike the required pose) . . . and Millie – positive and joyous. That's what they want and that what you're going to give me (He takes some shots) Nice . . . Better . . . Joyous Millie! (Millie contorts her face into a caricature of a smile) Bags of Yule spirit . . . Oh that's lovely Maxine, good girl – now don't grab your prezzie. Okay (Starts to rewind film). Let's have a breakette.

SANTA: Thank fuck. I'm dying for a gasper

MAXINE: Can I see the crib again?

AYNSLEY: Sure thing. Santa'll take you to find Mummy

SANTA: Come on chickadee (They go out of the Den)

AYNSLEY: (Looks at Millie with venom. She's merely looking troubled and anxious) This really isn't a goer. You're looking at her like – I dunno – like you want to turn her into soap. You got to . . .

MILLIE: I'm going to have to sit down . . . (She slumps into a pile of brightly wrapped presents)

AYNSLEY: Wha . . . ?

MILLIE: I'm haemorrhaging.

PART TWO. 1974

MILLIE is now 21 years old and has abandoned her ambitions to be a model; she works for her mother in the poodle parlour

and lives in her own small rented flat. She is less brash than formerly, less preoccupied with herself, more wayward in her behaviour.

27. INTERIOR. A NIGHT CLUB/DISCO – ZIGGY'S, WEYMOUTH. BRIGHTLY LIT.

The club is low rent, provincial. Peeling foil on the walls. At one end is a stage above which is draped a banner crudely aerosolled with the legend MISS WET TEE SHIRT SOUTH WEST 1974–5. Tables face the stage. The clientele is mostly male, mostly drunk, very noisy. The music is deafening – T Rex. A girl wearing a wet T shirt (and so transparent), bikini bottom and platform soled high heels is go go dancing on stage. In one corner of the stage stands GREG, the MC. He is about 30, slobbish, affable, dressed in vastly flared trousers, satin shirt with jumbo collar, platform soled boots. He wears eye liner. There is a plastic bucket of water at his feet. The audience is wolf whistling. GREG switches down the music, picks up a mike from the on-stage console and speaks. His accent is Bournemouth/Poole working class. There is 'whine' on the PA system.

GREG: Okay all right-ee. Those delicious rump and bumps belong to Julie, Julie from Swanage. Okay let's hear it now for Julie. Okay for Julie from Swanage – opportunity knockers. C'mon now (Audience cheers, stamps, whistles, claps, yells 'Get Em Off' etc. Julie who hasn't stopped dancing although there's barely audible music waves her arms in the air like a boxer) Okay Julie – take a low bow (She does so and also turns her bottom to the audience and wiggles it) Thank you Julie – you've no shortage of friends out there. Thank you (She wiggles off stage) And the next Bristol burdened bird bursting to be Miss Wet Tee Shirt South West 74 to 5 is – and I give you – Millie from Poole. (Millie comes on stage in dry T shirt, platform soled shoes with complicated ankle straps, bikini bottom) Let's give her a really big one just like she deserves. Yeh. (Loud applause. He switches up the music – The Sweet. Millie starts dancing with even fewer inhibitions than the previous contestant)

And Millie's a dog beautician – she's no dog but they're a couple of beauties all right. Let's go (Music full blast. Greg watches for a few seconds then picks up the bucket of water from the floor and approaches Millie who leans forward offering him her breast. He empties the bucket over her and she dances on)

28. INTERIOR. NIGHT CLUB. BACKSTAGE. DIM LIGHT.
A corridor with a naked bulb. There are piles of clothes on the floor. Toilet with open door. A dozen girls including MILLIE stand shivering in their wet T shirts, looking everywhere but at each other. Some are smoking. They do not talk to each other. GREG'S voice is immediately heard through the PA system from the stage.

GREG: 'n I want you to load your glasses so you can drink an Xmas toast to our new bazooma queen. 'N I wanna hear it for the lucky pair in just one moment. (Music comes up – Hot Chocolate. Greg appears at the end of the corridor. He addresses the girls) Cor parky eh? Brass monkeys – or blue tits. You love (He points at a girl called Diane) Diane idn't it. Never forget a chest (The other girls look resentfully at Diane) C'mon, you done, you're the one that got the most claps – if you'll pardon my Urdu. C'mon (Stretches out arm to her) Let's show what you got. (Diane follows him – they disappear from the corridor on to the stage, the music goes down) And now (We hear Greg's voice through the PA again) cool it lads – and now, what you fought through ice and blizzard to see – Ziggy gives you Miss Wet Tee Shirt 74 to 75, the twin wonders of Diane from Bovington. Diane!

29. INTERIOR. NIGHT CLUB/DISCO as 28. THE STAGE.
DIANE bounces on to stage. Music comes up loud immediately GREG has announced her name at end of 28. DIANE starts dancing

GREG: Look at that. Feast your eyes on the happy couple – that's what you voted for *with your hands.* (The audience is even rowdier than before. Many of them are on their feet, yelling 'Take it off'. This yell becomes a rhythmic chant. It

becomes threatening. DIANE'S dancing begins to flag. She looks nervously at GREG who is dancing on the spot and urging the audience to shout even louder; he takes up the mike again) I get the feeling Diane that Ziggy's paying customers are looking for a bit of a treat. (Diane has stopped dancing – she looks terrified) C'mon love – where's your sporting instinct? (The audience is baying. Greg moves to Diane and whispers to her. She looks at him, shakes her head as if about to cry and scuttles off stage. Audience boos, whistles – couple of glasses are thrown on stage. Greg follows her off stage)

30. INTERIOR. NIGHT CLUB. BACKSTAGE.

DIANE, panicky and tearful, runs down the corridor between the rest of the girls who are drying themselves and changing as they might on a beach, awkwardly. GREG catches up with her and grabs her arm as she pushes past MILLIE

GREG: What you fuckin playin at?

DIANE: Leggo

Audience stamping, yelling abuse, further sounds of smashing glasses

GREG: 'Sonly for a laugh

DIANE: *No*

GREG: (Looks at Millie) Wha' about you – you take your top off?

MILLIE: Why not?

GREG: (Taking her by the wrist, forcefully) C'mon (He pulls her along through the corridor) What's your . . .

MILLIE: Millie (They disappear. Audience begins to cheer. We hear Greg through the PA again)

GREG: By refusing – gents, please, gents – by refusing to accord with the finest traditions of Miss Wet Tee Shirt South West . . .

31. INTERIOR. THE BEDROOM OF MILLIE'S FLAT. MORNING.

The room is not homely. It is drab, cheaply furnished. There are a few Christmas cards on the mantelpiece. An electric light

with a paper shade hangs from the ceiling, it is switched on. The curtains are half drawn. GREG is in the bed, having spent the night with MILLIE who is kneeling on the floor by the dressing table putting on slap. She is already dressed. On the bedside table, in a heart-shaped frame, is the picture of MILES as a child which we previously saw in the photocube; also on the table is a three quarters empty bottle of Bourbon and a half empty one of Tequila. There are a number of glasses and a mug of steaming Nescafé. GREG's clothes are littered about the floor. He is attempting to light a cigarette

GREG: Orwh, Christ (Inhales loudly) Real lorry driver's crutch

MILLIE: (Not looking round) Some coffee there

GREG: (Rubbing his mascara'd eyes, sticking out his tongue as though to air it) No . . . think I'll (He reaches for the Bourbon bottle, unscrews cap clumsily) Hair of the . . . Whole fucking coat of the dog in fact, that's wha' . . . (Swigs from bottle) 'Sbetter. You all right?

MILLIE: Me, I'm fine

GREG: Bit fifty-fifty wadn't it – last night. With that Diane

MILLIE: Prissy slag

GREG: She were scared out her wits, poor bint – didn't know what she was lettin herself in for I s'pose. Not everyone can handle stardom like you can

MILLIE: She had these terrible stretchmarks, like – that's why. Scared of showing em off

GREG: That's sad idn't it, that's really sad. (Drinks again) Still, we got a result in the end didn't we. (Stretching out for the overflowing ashtray – joint ends, strips of Rizla packet etc. – Greg knocks over the Tequila bottle on to the framed picture of Miles, cracking its glass. Millie starts up from her kneeling position as Greg leans out of bed to assess what he's done) Oh Christ I think I been and . . . ssstt

MILLIE: (Moves to bedside and bends over as Greg picks up frame with the broken glass still in it) What you done?

GREG: This phot . . . the glass. (He looks at picture) This your kid?

MILLIE: (Distracted) No

GREG: (Realizing that she's upset by this tiny breakage) I'm so bleedin clumsy I'm really sorry
MILLIE: (Pursing her lips, fibbing to prevent his embarrassment) It doesn't matter, honest. It's nothing – I, I don't know why I hung on to it
GREG: (Doubtful) That's all right then
MILLIE: Just a friend from way back – you know
GREG: Right. Sentimental attachment (Nods sagely)
MILLIE: Yeh – something like that
GREG: (After a pause during which Millie has fussed around, tidying the bedside table) You haven't got a kid then?
MILLIE: (Slightly furtive) No . . . why?
GREG: (Shrugs) Well, you know . . .
MILLIE: (Sits down on bed) No – you tell me
GREG: Well – I kind of like you. Yeh
MILLIE: (Laughing) You're quite shy really
GREG: Bashful Greg they call me (MILLIE leans over and kisses him rather chastely)
MILLIE: Look I got to go – if I don't do my shopping today I'm not ever goin to get it done. But tell you what, let's meet for lunch . . . if you're not doing anything that is (Very timid)
GREG: Who's being bashful now?
MILLIE: Well, you never know
GREG: What – it's love em and leave em usually is it?
MILLIE: Often don't have no choice in the matter
GREG: Well that's not how it'll be with me. You goin in the centre?
MILLIE: Yes
GREG: New Italian place on Old Christchurch Road, just by the park
MILLIE: (Surprised) Great! Two o'clock?
GREG: You're on
MILLIE: (Getting up and going to put on her fake fur overcoat over her pullover and baggies) And I tell you one thing – you were really good
GREG: (Self parodically, jokily wiggling his shoulders) Well, don't tell me love. Tell your friends

MILLIE screws up her face in mock disapproval, blows him a kiss, stops half way out the door

MILLIE: Remember to lock the door Casanova.

32. INTERIOR/EXTERIOR. MILLIE'S CAR. SUBURBAN ARTERIAL ROADS.

MILLIE is driving alone in her scruffy Escort. She looks happy, is smiling to herself with slightly smug contentment. Car tape is playing 'Superstar' by The Carpenters, MILLIE is singing along, glancing at herself in mirror. She is in nearside lane, and is overtaken by a Healey 3000 the same colour as the one Miles used to drive. The camera follows it. She comes to a roundabout, stops. A black Citroën DS draws up so its back seat is level with her. MILLIE turns her head after feeling she is being observed. In the Citroën, staring at her, is THE BOY whose photo has represented MILES as a child. He looks inquisitive and scared. The Citroën draws away – we do not see the driver. MILLIE chases it but cannot catch it. We see it disappearing. After a while MILLIE gives up the chase which she has made in a daze. She draws into the side of the road with an abruptness that causes the car behind her (with an Xmas tree on the roofrack) to slam on its brakes and the car behind that to slide into its rear. MILLIE sits holding the steering wheel looking through the windscreen with a blank half-smile. The drivers of the two cars that have collided approach her angrily, but she doesn't notice them. FIRST DRIVER stands beside her window and bangs on it when she doesn't move

FIRST DRIVER: What the hell do you think you're up to?

MILLIE turns to him with a sweet quizzical smile

SECOND DRIVER: (Bangs on roof) Open it will you!

MILLIE starts her car and drives off, apparently oblivious. SECOND DRIVER picks up a stone and hurls it after her. It misses.

33. EXTERIOR. BOURNEMOUTH SHOPPING CENTRE. DAY.

MILLIE has just parked her car in front of a parade of shops, all decorated for Christmas. On the other side of the road is the edge of the sprawling Central Gardens. As she gets out of the car with her shopping bag etc. she sees THE BOY looking at her

from between shrubs in the Gardens. By the time she has crossed the road, weaving between hooting, braking vehicles, whose drivers yell at her, THE BOY has disappeared.

34. EXTERIOR. LOWER CENTRAL GARDENS, BOURNEMOUTH. DAY.

MILLIE stands at the place where THE BOY was, her eyes combing the crowded park (a short cut for shoppers) to find THE BOY. She turns desperately from one direction to another – there are quite a lot of children with their parcel-burdened parents. She finally sees him in a queue of people filing across a footbridge over the stream through the Gardens. She runs stumblingly down the slope towards the bridge. She is impeded by the crowds, prams etc. People look indignantly at her as she shoves past. She sees THE BOY again on the far side of the stream, at the further extremity of the Gardens – he is turning to look at her. MILLIE looks quite mad now. Impatient and desperate she jumps into the stream, which is about ten feet wide, and wades across it. Passers-by look on astonished from both banks and the bridge.

35. EXTERIOR. SHOPPING STREET. DAY.

MILLIE is running, with difficulty – her shoes are high heeled and full of water, her trousers are soaked and so is the hem of her fake fur coat. People in the street look at her as they might a wino. A GIRL she knows greets her

GIRL: Hi Millie, how are . . .

But MILLIE doesn't even notice her and runs on. She sees THE BOY in front of a department store; he crooks his head and looks over his shoulder at her. MILLIE waits to cross the busy street to reach him. When she gets to the other pavement she can no longer see him. She enters the store.

36. INTERIOR. DEPARTMENT STORE. DAY.

In the foyer of the store a group of carol singers is doing 'Away In A Manger'. The place is thronging, animated – everyone is carrying awkward parcels. MILLIE pushes manically past scent customers with spray testers, and people holding clothes

against themselves, and irritable squabbling families. She arrives in the toy department and scrutinizes the children. Across ranks of counters she sees THE BOY near a sign 'MEET SANTA IN HIS DEN'. She hurries in that direction. When she gets to Santa's Den THE BOY has disappeared and the Den has a tasselled cord across its entrance with a CLOSED sign on it. Nevertheless MILLIE enters, stepping over the cord, catching it with her foot and pulling over the chrome columns that it is extended between.

37. INTERIOR. SANTA'S DEN. DIM LIGHT.

MILLIE goes through the labyrinthine gloom of the papier-mâché tunnel. The camera follows her as she bumps into things, knocks her head and so on. She rounds a bend and there beside a tree in his bright painted sleigh is SANTA. He is being fellated by a make-up counter SALESGIRL in store uniform. He sits, she kneels. His hood, with its attached beard, is pushed back so that the beard is on his forehead. His cloak is gathered around his belly. He is middle aged, unshaven. He looks in horror at MILLIE. The SALESGIRL covers her face

SANTA: What the . . . We're closed

MILLIE (Near hysterical) The, the little boy who came in here . . .

SANTA: What little boy? Out! Get out!

MILLIE: He came in here . . . I . . .

SANTA: (Pulling down cloak and getting up) Exit (Points) Out. Hop it!

MILLIE: But he . . . I saw him, he . . .

SANTA: Little boys can read. It says closed. Beat it!

MILLIE: I . . . ooh, I (Starts to cry, and leaves)

38. INTERIOR. ITALIAN RESTAURANT. DAY.

An almost empty pizza trough. GREG is picking at a roll, the carafe of wine in front of him on the table is almost empty. When MILLIE comes in, dishevelled and shocked, a WAITER who is lounging by the window looks at her as if deciding whether to ask her to leave

WAITER: Can I help?

MILLIE walks straight past him and sits down opposite GREG. The WAITER follows her nervously. GREG looks up at her puzzled

GREG: Christ.

WAITER: You being bothered?

GREG: What's the matter? (To waiter) No no – it's okay

WAITER: Drink Madam? (Millie turns and stares at him crazily)

GREG: Millie – you been in an accident? (The waiter shakes his head and moves back to the window)

MILLIE: Got a cig? (She picks one from a pack on the table, puts it in her mouth but doesn't light it)

GREG: *Millie* – what is it? Where's your shopping? Here, have you been mugged? (Millie sits looking into thin air) Have you? (Greg gets up and moves round table to her – she grabs him round the trunk and clings to him, crushing the unlit cigarette. She sobs jerkily) Now tell me what happened

MILLIE: (Shakes her head) Wasn't anything

GREG: You can tell me love – I won't be angry

MILLIE: Oh . . . it's so silly . . . I just had a turn . . . (Greg looks worried)

GREG: How d'you get so wet?

MILLIE: I had a fall – me own fault

GREG: There there – no one's blaming you for anything

MILLIE: Greg?

GREG: I'm here

MILLIE: Greg, don't go, please please don't

GREG: It's all right love, it's all right (He pulls a chair over and sits) Now what happened?

MILLIE: I told you – I came over bad, had a touch of the Fyffes (Laughs vacantly)

GREG: But why?

MILLIE: (Shrugs) Sometimes I don't feel I'm really alive . . . You aren't goin to bung me are you jus' 'cause I . . . Mean, we all have days when we don't get a result – don't we. We all got our problems.

39. INTERIOR. MILLIE'S MOTHER'S SITTING ROOM. LATE AFTERNOON.

The room is little changed from Part One. There are a few more gewgaws and holiday souvenirs, and there are Christmas cards strung on ribbons from the picture rail and a miniature Christmas tree. MILLIE sits mute and blank – she is wearing a Japanese tartan skirt that is evidently her mother's and a pair of carpet slippers. A scarlet poodle is at her feet. GREG, fairly drunk, is watching cartoons on TV, the sound is off. MOTHER is standing awkwardly in the door to the room, chewing her lips, looking from GREG to MILLIE.

MOTHER: Nice drop scone then Mill?

MILLIE shakes her head slightly without altering her vacant gaze. GREG looks round furtively

MOTHER: What about you then – Greg?

GREG: That's ever so kind thanks but I'll stick with the bev

MOTHER: (Fishwifely confidential and coming over to Greg) Shouldn't wonder if that wasn't what the problem was . . . she got like this before one Christmas

GREG: (Gaping at TV) Yeh, it's best to go easy idn't it?

MOTHER: Moderation in all things

GREG: (Attempting to make joke) Apart from excess

MOTHER: Eh?

GREG: Apart fro . . . Oh, it doesn't matter

MOTHER: Oh. Well, I'm going to have a drop scone (Goes out of room)

GREG goes on watching TV, belches a couple of times, undoes top button of too tight flares. MILLIE watches him, furtively, appraisingly

GREG: (To TV) You bloody stupid mouse (Turns to Millie with a shake of his head) D'you see that – unbelievable

MILLIE: (Soft, deliberate) Do you want to marry me Greg?

GREG: (Stares at her a long while before speaking. Exhales) Well er . . . Er. Yeh (He sounds as if he surprises himself) Yeh, all right, yeh

MILLIE: I think it would make a lot of things better

GREG: (Rather puzzled) Sure. (Looks pensive about his new status)

MILLIE: (Getting up and moving to him) You mean it?
GREG: You know – I really think I do.
MILLIE: (Hugging him) You're an angel. (She kneels on the floor beside his chair cuddling him. Then she breaks the embrace and calls) Mum! Mum!

PART THREE. 1986

MILLIE is 33 years old and has a daughter KIKI who is ten. She and GREG have prospered in a modest way – a disco, antiques and 'general trading', and their smallholding where they let caravans, keep chickens and geese, trade horses etc. This smallholding, where nearly all of this part takes place, is in the heathland north of Bournemouth and is typical of the buildings in the scrappy villages and former shack-colonies there among rhododendrons, pines, conifers, silver birches. The house is a dull spec box of c1920, but has been tarted up with shutters, carriage lamps, bright paintwork; it is in the country, but not of it. There are architecturally bereft outhouses and sheds.

40. INTERIOR. BEDROOM. EARLY SUMMER EVENING.
This is MILLIE and GREG's bedroom. It is furnished with cheap antiques, junk shop troves etc. It is also used as a store for antiques so is cluttered and in disarray – the whole house is like this. MILLIE is resting on the bed, reading a magazine. She is wearing a mini-skirt, a T shirt with the legend 'Presence Of The Past' printed on it in pop-gothic letters. She looks fit, healthy, tanned. We hear KIKI's voice immediately, echoing MILLIE's voice at the end of Part Two.

KIKI: (Coming up the stairs) Mummy . . . Mummy. (Millie puts down the magazine and closes her eyes) Mummy! (Kiki bounds into the room. She is a fresh faced, nice looking child) Mummy – are you (She peers at Millie to see if she's asleep) Are you asleep?
MILLIE: (With a huge smile) Boo (Kiki starts back and giggles)

KIKI: Oh rotten! Granma's here Mummy. (Kiki jumps on to bed and yells) She's in here Gran, pretending to be asleep
MOTHER: (From stairs) Ooh the lazy bantu – you coming down
MILLIE: Make yourself a cuppa Mum, I'll only be a mo. (She cuddles Kiki) Where's Daddy?
KIKI: He's outside
MILLIE: Is he ready Honey?

41. EXTERIOR. FRONT OF HOUSE. EARLY EVENING.
There are several cars parked, in various states of disrepair. There's a caravan on blocks and a horsebox. In the distance is a field with makeshift gymkhana jumps and beyond it a number of caravans. MOTHER is sitting at a table with a parasol above it near the front door drinking a cup of tea. GREG is rummaging in the glove compartment of a partly dismantled car; he is middle aged now, and no longer attempts to disguise his portliness. He is wearing a dinner jacket with a wing-collared shirt. MILLIE and KIKI come out of the house.
MILLIE: (Kissing her mother) Hullo Darling
MOTHER: (Looking at her mini-skirt and stiletto heels) Millie – you can't wear that
MILLIE: It's theme night (She prods the legend on her T shirt) I'm going Sixties, Greg's the Twenties
MOTHER: Yes, but
GREG: (Looking up from car) I got no objections. Far from it
MOTHER: She used to wear them right up to – well, I always thought it was going a bit far, that's all
MILLIE: Mum!
MOTHER: They could have got you into trouble
GREG: (Running in a parody of slow motion) Give us a hug scrumptious (He seizes her and twirls her round)
KIKI: Always snogging
GREG: Been trying to find that fedora I had
KIKI: I haven't got *anyone* to snog with. If I had a little brother . . . You two listening (She addresses her embracing parents) . . . I said, if I had a brother
MOTHER: You've got everyone you could want Darling

KIKI: I haven't got a *brother* though.

MOTHER: (To Millie) Oh, I tell you what. I almost forgot. That Miles chap you were so keen on (Millie breaks her embrace from Greg, worriedly) – well, what d'you think. He's been lost at sea. Missing presumed drowned

MILLIE: Oh no – how awful (She is embarrassed and conscious of the tense way Greg is looking at Mother)

MOTHER: Yeh. Two kids, business thriving – he'd expanded into swimming pools you know. Went out from the new marina with this other chap – sea was like a mill pond, they can't understand it . . .

MILLIE: Lord – I suppose I better write to his parents

KIKI: Who's Miles?

MILLIE: What about the other, the chap with him?

MOTHER: (Shrugs) They don't know. Mystery. No one knows who he was. Miles turned up at the marina with him, introduced him to the chap at the chandlers and that was the last anyone saw of the poor lad. Called Pat – that's all the chap at the chandlers could recall. They don't go in for formal introductions, your yacht set

GREG: (Who has been watching Millie with suspicion) We ought to make a move

MILLIE: I done your bed Mum – we'll try not to wake you. Don't suppose we'll be back much before four. They've given us a licence extension till two thirty

MOTHER: Oh?

GREG: That cost a drink I can tell you.

42. INTERIOR. GREG'S CAR. EARLY EVENING.

GREG is driving. MILLIE sits beside him in silence. They have been arguing, that is evident from their faces. They are driving through countryside, though we only see it as a backdrop – the entire scene is played with the frame filled by their heads.

GREG: Who *was* he?

MILLIE: (Inhaling in annoyance) Jesus. Greg. How many times d'you want to hear – he was just a boy I went out with when I was sixteen. For about two months

GREG: (After pause) Was he your first?

MILLIE: What *right* have you got to give me this third degree?
GREG: You're my wife, remember. I'm just interested, in everything about you. Was he your first?
MILLIE: Can it will you. I'm . . . Look – I never go asking you . . .
GREG: Don't you? (Pause) What was so special about this guy?
MILLIE: Nothing – I can't even remember what he looked like
GREG: You mean you've forgotten the face but you remember the rest
MILLIE: You're low sometimes
GREG: I'm just interested
MILLIE: There's absolutely nothing to be interested in
GREG: That's not what your Mum thinks. A girl's Mum always knows
MILLIE: She knows nothing
GREG: (Knowingly) Uh-huh – so there was something to know
MILLIE shakes her head and turns to face out of side window.

43. EXTERIOR. DISCO CAR PARK. NIGHT.
We see the exterior of the club with a neon sign, lit, announcing THE BLACKSPOT. The car park is practically empty. GREG'S Range Rover is still there. The light on the sign is switched off and a door opens. MILLIE and GREG come through it, GREG jangling a bunch of keys. He locks the door with difficulty. He is so drunk he can hardly stand. As he is locking the door MILLIE leans against the wall breathing in great draughts of air. GREG finally succeeds in turning all the locks. He proffers his arm to MILLIE.

GREG: Going my way young lady (He is incoherent)
MILLIE: (Assuming a tart's pose) Sure thing sailor – if the price is right. Can you afford me?
GREG: Course I can – I'm a wealthy night spot owner
She takes his arm and they walk towards the car
MILLIE: Think I'd better drive
GREG: You are very probably dead right. I feel a tiny weeny

bit badered. (He breaks away from her) Time for another Frazer Nash (He pees against the back of the car) Here I think you better drive the jam

MILLIE: (Laughs) I just said

GREG: So you did. You did, didn't you?

44. EXTERIOR/INTERIOR. MAIN ROAD. NIGHT.

MILLIE is driving. GREG has his feet up on the dash. The car is travelling through open country. There is no other traffic.

GREG: Know what?

MILLIE: (Peering through windscreen) What?

GREG: If Tone's right we took more dinari tonight than . . . than we ever done

MILLIE: Brill cream

GREG: Worth bunging that beak a monkey wasn't it?

MILLIE: You're a smart one my man

GREG: So Rio here we come

MILLIE: Or Cairo

GREG: Bangkok

MILLIE: Not on your life – you'd get massage fatigue

GREG: Too right. (Pause) Here, Mill – I'm sorry about all that – you know, all that rabbit about that bloke

MILLIE: No harm done

GREG: (Starts to sing with clicking of fingers and clapping) 'Under my Thumb, girl doo doo doo doo. It's down to me, the time has come doo doo . . .'

MILLIE: (Sharp) Don't sing that. (Greg looks at her surprised, and stops)

45. EXTERIOR/INTERIOR. B-ROAD. NIGHT.

The car is travelling fast on a road across the New Forest fringes – long straights and sudden bends, trees close to the road. MILLIE is leaning forward to get better vision. GREG is asleep in passenger seat

46. EXTERIOR/INTERIOR. B-ROAD. NIGHT.

GREG is still asleep. MILLIE is biting her lips in concentration

MILLIE: (To Greg, though she knows he's asleep) Be there soon my love

The Range Rover goes round a bend. In the headlights, in the middle of the road stands MAT. He is played by the same actor as MILES, though his hair is short, his clothes are of the 80s etc.; he is about 16 years old. We see him, then his face. He looks straight at MILLIE. His pose is formal, operatic, ambiguous. It is not clear what he is doing – whether he is hitching a lift, or is drunk or drugged, or whether he is an hallucination of Millie's. She brakes hard. He doesn't move. He still looks straight at her. She swerves and the vehicle skids. It hits the verge, goes up a bank, strikes a tree and turns over. The collision is furious, brutal, messy. MILLIE struggles to free herself. She is suspended above GREG who is unconscious. She gets out through the broken windshield. She is bleeding and bruised. She hobbles on her high heels around the car looking for MAT who is nowhere to be seen. She hears a crackling in the undergrowth on the far side of the road and walks towards it as if mesmerized. She seems to have forgotten GREG and his plight.

47. EXTERIOR. WOODS AND HEATH. NIGHT.

MILLIE, her skirt and T shirt ripped, trips and stumbles and staggers between trees, through clearings, across a landscape of gorse and heather. Boughs make awful shapes. There are strange noises everywhere. She senses that she is in a threatening wilderness but presses on unheedingly.

48. EXTERIOR. WOODS AND HEATH. DAYBREAK.

A grass snake slithers from MILLIE'S path. There is birdsong. She sees smoke and goes towards it. Behind bushes near a stream she finds the remains of a fire. There are bones around it. Some are charred, some have hair sticking to them. Her vision becomes flawed, colours mutate. The quality of ambient light changes. She pushes through undergrowth into a clearing and comes upon THREE MEN with knives gutting a stag from whose head protrudes a crossbow's bolt. Their faces are smeared with camouflage make-up. When they see MILLIE one

of them grabs a crossbow and begins to wind it up. He points it at her and addresses her in a near whisper.

MAN: Beat it . . . You din't see us . . . We don't exist

49. EXTERIOR. B-ROAD AT SCENE OF ACCIDENT. DAY.
Police cars, ambulance, firemen with oxyacetylene cutting tools. GREG, regaining consciousness, is being lifted by firemen and ambulancemen from the wrecked Range Rover. A CONSTABLE is listening to police radio through the window of a patrol car

CONSTABLE: Got you. Over (He puts handset back into car and walks to another policeman, a Sergeant) They found her Sarge, wandering about up by Picket Post

SERGEANT: Pissed?

CONSTABLE: Didn't say so

SERGEANT: Chummy smells like he had more VAT than the Excise. S'pose it was shock then. Amnesia like. Takes em funny

50. INTERIOR. GREG AND MILLIE'S HOUSE. DAY.
A downstairs room which is used as an office cum store-room. There is a desk piled high with papers and on the walls are posters for night club attractions. The window bay contains a single unmade bed – the table beside it is littered with dirty cups, ashtrays, lager cans etc. The room looks generally unkempt. The phone is ringing. We hear various bumps and crashes and GREG'S voice

GREG: Hold on you bastard I'm coming . . .

GREG comes into the room in a self-propelled wheelchair, knocking the door jamb as he does so. He looks ill, is unshaven and wears a T shirt with the legend SPASTIC. He collides with a standard lamp and picks up the phone

GREG: 'Lo (He is breathless. Listens) Yeh, hang on a sec. (He adjusts himself in the chair) Right (Listens) Yeh that's right. (Listens) Well, it's kinda handyman plus, you might describe it . . . (Listens) Yeh there's the chickens, the horses, erm, keeping the caravans up to scratch – fetching paraffin an' that . . . (Listens) Well, negotiable like – depends on

whether you want the bungalow (Listens) Well I suppose it's more of a summerhouse really. 'Sgot its own kitchen an' that (Listens) No no – I did it, me an the wife then I had this accident couple of months back so . . . (Listens) 'Bout six thirty then. The wife'll be back by then, 'cause she'll have to show you outside . . . (Listens) All right, bye see you then

51. INTERIOR. SITTING ROOM. DAY.

The room is lined with mostly indifferent paintings. Some of the furniture is quite good – but the room still looks a mess. GREG is watching children's TV, drinking lager from the can. There are empty cans on the floor, and cigarettes stubbed out in the ketchup on the side of a plate. MILLIE comes in. She is tired, careworn; she wears subfusc work trousers, her hair is dishevelled, she seems run down. She has the local paper, open at the classified ads.

GREG: Where's Keeks?

MILLIE: (Scanning paper) She's over at Bob and Sandy's

GREG: I'll bet she hasn't done the horses

MILLIE: Darling – she has no time to play, she can't work all

GREG: I know, I know – but those horses don't know do they? Someone's got to feed them . . . Christ I never realized how much I did till I wasn't there to do it

MILLIE: (Looking methodically down columns of paper) That's why we're getting someone in to

GREG: Yeh but she's got to pull her weight – this place is going to rack and

MILLIE: *Darling* – it's all under control (Throws down paper) Not in there, I don't understand it

GREG: It's perfectly simple – there'll be some chap there in the advert department tipping off a mate of his. You know – little backhander

MILLIE: Guess so. Ooh (She clutches her back) I don't know what I've done – it was carting one of those bleeding calor gas containers

GREG: I told you not to . . . Anyway (He takes her hand) he'll be here at half six

MILLIE: What's he called?

52. INTERIOR/EXTERIOR. FRONT DOOR AND HALL. EARLY EVENING.

MAT is at the door which has just been opened by MILLIE. He stands with the setting sun glowing around the edges of his face and hair. Quick cut from last sentence of previous scene to his introduction of himself. He is beaming with near beatific generosity

MAT: Mat. I telephoned. You're expecting me (He shows no sign of recognition of MILLIE. He proffers his left hand without comment or explanation.) Hullo – so *this is it*

MILLIE: (Incredulous, shocked) I . . . I . . . yes. Are you (She gapes at him as though to say 'are you real?'. She takes his left hand with hers and grips it, trying to establish that he is not a mirage or something. He smiles even more) Where – where have you been?

MAT: (With a semblance of deliberate misunderstanding. He touches his hair and riffles it. It is slightly wet) Swimming. Is that what you mean? I've been swimming

MILLIE: You better come in

MAT: I do the butterfly (Mimes arm movement of that stroke, so filling the door frame. Then enters, smiling all the while)

MILLIE: My husband's in there (Holds open door of sitting room. Mat beams as he goes in) Greg. This is Mat – would you like some tea? Glass of beer?

MAT: Water? I like water

MILLIE: (Looks further astonished) Sure

53. INTERIOR/EXTERIOR. KITCHEN AND GARDEN. EARLY EVENING.

We see MILLIE through the kitchen window. She is at the sink filling a pint glass with water – she looks out in horror. When we see in the room the water is overflowing from the glass on to her hands – she seems oblivious.

54. INTERIOR. SITTING ROOM. EARLY EVENING.
MILLIE and GREG. He's watching a game show on TV. Through the window we can see MAT walking away from the house. He has a light bouncy step, close to skipping. KIKI cycles into the garden from the road. MAT stops to greet her. She stands astride her cycle for a moment then he goes out of sight and she comes up to the front door

MILLIE: (Preoccupiedly watching Mat and Kiki, fiddling the while with a cigarette lighter, adjusting its flame) Suppose I had better get the bungalow seen to . . .

GREG: Yes . . . He's got a fine pair of shoulders for a lad of seventeen

MILLIE: Sixteen

GREG: (Looks at her questioningly) Anyroad, he'll need 'em. Bit of a corker him being able to start so quick.

KIKI: (Running into room) He's a bit queer isn't he? (Millie looks at her suspiciously)

GREG: Eh?

KIKI: Him. He said 'I'm the hired man.' He coming to *live* here too?

MILLIE: Just for a while

KIKI: Know what else he said? He said 'So long little sister.'

MILLIE turns away sharply to look out of the window. We see her face in the state of suppressed shock that increasingly becomes familiar.

55. INTERIOR/EXTERIOR. THE 'BUNGALOW'. DAY.
The bungalow is in fact a converted railway carriage with a little verandah. It is situated by itself some way from the house, though close to chicken coops and sheds. MILLIE is on the verandah; she is tense, she wrings her hands without realizing that she is doing so, her manner is jumpy, vulnerable. MAT, with a duffle bag over his shoulder, is inside the bungalow leaning out of one of the windows on to the verandah. He is, as always, beaming

MAT: No need to worry about the smell

MILLIE: It'll go – when it's aired

MAT: I have no sense of smell. That's one of the things about me. It won't take long to get it cleaned out . . .
MILLIE: It's done . . . I've done it – last night
MAT: Ah yes (meaning 'no')
MILLIE: Is that (she points at duffle bag) all your stuff?
MAT: That's right
MILLIE: (Strenuously casual) Where do you – where've you been living?
MAT: (Huge smile) Nowhere as good as this – Hell, that's what you'd call it (He suddenly vaults out of the window on to the verandah) That grass looks good (He indicates the tufty lawn that stretches between the bungalow and the house)
MILLIE: It's just the usual . . . (Mat drops his duffle bag, springs on to the grass and walks on his hands – he does so with a naturalness and spontaneity that suggest custom rather than exhibitionism. Millie watches him, intrigued and scared. He then does a succession of elegant cartwheels) You should have been in a circus
MAT: (On his feet again) I should, shouldn't I? (He flings himself in the air and does a somersault) Run away to the big top – that's the orphan's dream
MILLIE: (Steeling herself) Are you an orph – where are your parents?
MAT: (Stops the movement he is making, and is thus posed like a frozen discus thrower) My father died recently. (Then he flings himself about again)

56. EXTERIOR. IN FRONT OF HOUSE. AFTERNOON.
MAT is tidying the garden – lugging lumps of sump and scrap. He wears shorts and his muscly body gleams with sweat. MILLIE is doing the same but lighter work. KIKI is at the window of the sitting room, drawing; from within the room comes the sound of TV racing commentary. KIKI gets up and comes out of the house with a sheet of drawing paper. She takes it to MILLIE and shows it her
KIKI: Shall I show him?
MILLIE: (Picking up an old exhaust with her gardening-gloved hands) I should, yes honey

KIKI: You show him (shy)

MILLIE: You did it, so you . . .

KIKI: Mummy

MILLIE: Don't be such a scaredy cat. Mat! (Mat looks up from a pile of metal) Kiki's got something for you. (He walks towards them)

KIKI: It's only a *little* something. (She holds it to him) It's you with that chain thing you were pulling

MAT: It's very clever of you. It's very nice indeed

KIKI: It's for you

MAT: Thank you

KIKI: I'll sign it to you (She takes drawing and crouches to write, then presents it to him again with bashful formality)

MAT: I am honoured Little Sister (Millie gapes at him) But I tell you one thing – my name has only one tee. Emm . . . A . . . Tee – as in oh (Hieratic gesture) *mat*ernal . . . *mat*erialize (Beaming at Millie)

KIKI: I'll rub it out

GREG: (From in sitting room) Mill!

MILLIE: (Preoccupied. She gathers herself) Coming (She goes to window)

GREG: There's this bloody great wasp, hornet thing – can't reach it. Can you . . .

MAT: It's all right (lollops into house)

MILLIE remains at the window looking into the room, flapping and not knowing quite what to do.

57. INTERIOR. SITTING ROOM. AFTERNOON.

GREG is spinning pathetically in his wheelchair, lashing the air with a rolled copy of *TV Times*. He grunts as he strikes out. There is the angry buzzing of the hornet. MAT enters

GREG: Oh thanks Mat – it's up there the fucker

MAT: Okay. Keep still. (He tracks the insect)

GREG: Here (He proffers the rolled magazine)

MAT gestures that he doesn't want it. He stands on tip toe and reaches up to where the insect has settled on a cornice. He doesn't swat it but confidently picks it up. We see it between his fingers with the sting held away from his palm. GREG

watches, amazed, as MAT takes it to the open window and releases it.

MAT: (Usual vast smile) There . . .

GREG: Why . . . d'you . . . Why didn't you clout it?

MAT: (Half towards Millie who's outside window) Thou shalt not kill

58. EXTERIOR/INTERIOR. THE BUNGALOW. EARLY MORNING.

MILLIE is walking towards the bungalow with a mug of coffee. She stops on the verandah. She is wearing grubby work clothes.

MILLIE: (Tentative) Mat . . . Mat?

There is no reply. She is by now wearing a near permanent expression of scared bemusement. She hesitates then lifts the crude curtain draped across one of the open windows. MAT is asleep, naked on a mattress on the floor. He is curled in an unmistakably foetal position – legs to his stomach, knees to his chin, head clutched by his hands. MILLIE watches him agape. Then she looks down at the coffee, pulls back the curtain and taps on the door. No reply. She taps again. Then she opens the door. The scene is as it was but MAT is not there – shocked, MILLIE drops the coffee on the floor. MILLIE stands on the threshold shocked. When she hears MAT's voice she jumps, and isn't sure where it's coming from

MAT: Up with the – lark? Is it? I always forget (He is standing at the end of the bungalow, holding on to the verandah rail and leaning backwards like a 50s pin-up. He is wearing a pair of dayglo lime shorts)

MILLIE: (Looks at him accusingly) I brought you . . . (She bends to pick up mug) Spilt it

MAT: (Portentously, smiling) Don't – cry – over – spilt – milk

MILLIE: (Looks at him for some moments before speaking) I forgot to tell you – I'm taking Greg to hospital. There're some new people arriving – for the caravan nearest the coppice. I should be back . . . but if

MAT: I shall make them as welcome as you have me

MILLIE: Like I say – should be back

MAT: And Greg?
MILLIE: Uh?
MAT: Will he be back?
MILLIE: Of course
MAT: You aren't going to abandon him in the hospital then?
MILLIE: (Looking away) No
MAT: That's nice – it does happen you know (Grins)

59. INTERIOR. SITTING ROOM. EARLY EVENING.
GREG in wheelchair, looking out of window. He has been attempting to knit. A knot of wool and two needles are in his lap, hopelessly entwined. Attached to one arm of wheelchair is a makeshift tray with a Tequila bottle and a glass on it. Through the window we see MILLIE desultorily pulling dead buds from flowers and MAT and KIKI who are playing a sort of hopscotch game together, giggling and touching each other and ribbing each other. GREG surveys the scene with blank despondency. Not looking at his hands he takes one of the needles, pulls the wool from it, lifts it in front of his face, inspects it and slowly puts it into his mouth. He begins to gag and choke, his face is terribly twisted. And then the needle is expelled. There are tears in his eyes. He spins his chair round, propels himself to the TV, switches it on and drinks from his Tequila bottle.

60. EXTERIOR. OUTSIDE FRONT OF HOUSE. EARLY EVENING.
MILLIE is kneeling to pull weeds from a flowerbed. MAT is swinging KIKI round and round. There is a crash of breaking glass. GREG has thrown the empty Tequila bottle at the window from inside the sitting room.

61. INTERIOR. SITTING ROOM. EARLY EVENING.
GREG, brandishing a knitting needle, is trying to attack MILLIE – it is more pitiful than frightening, his wild threshing. He bumps into furniture in his chair. MILLIE stands back from him shaking her head

GREG: Was you who got me like this . . .

MILLIE: Greg

GREG: I'll never forget that, it was you . . . You put me in this . . . hearse (Millie stifles a scream) I'm different from you – half o' me is dead. Might as well chop it off. Put me on one of them trolleys . . . Here, look at this (He picks up a china statuette, hurls it at the wall) There you go (Millie whimpers) You know what – when you put me out there in the sun like a lump of old meat – you know what: I bleedin' watched it. My shadow moves round me. I watch it and I can't do any soddin' thing about it. Yours, you're all right, yours – you can move around it just like you want. As you please. Me, I'm a lump of dung. An' it's all fuckin' down to you. You made me join another race. (Millie goes out of the door sobbing) That's right, turn your back, bury the bastard

62. INTERIOR. KITCHEN. DAY.

MILLIE takes a steak from under the grill, puts it on to a plate which is on a tray. Tips a pan of fried potatoes on to the plate. Carries the tray out of the kitchen

63. INTERIOR. SITTING ROOM and HALL. DAY.

MILLIE with tray. She pushes open sitting room door with elbow

MILLIE: Here you are (She is startled to find the room empty, and Greg gone. She turns round) Greg . . . Greg (She looks into downstairs office)

64. INTERIOR/EXTERIOR. KITCHEN and OUTSIDE OF BUNGALOW. DAY.

MILLIE puts the plate of steak and potatoes into the oven and lights it. She looks out of the window and sees GREG and MAT, dressed in his shorts, near the bungalow. They are talking absorbedly. MILLIE is puzzled. She watches them for a few seconds then goes from the room. She returns almost immediately with a pair of field glasses which she focuses on them. We see them through the glasses: GREG looks more animated

and precise than he has since the accident. MAT, for the first time that we've seen, is not smiling – his face is cruel, contorted. He suddenly lifts his arms and hands, palms upwards, fingers half clenched. Then he touches GREG's left shoulder. Together they look as if they are trying to remember some forgotten ritual. Then MAT starts to push GREG towards the house, and he begins to beam again. MILLIE takes the glasses from her face and hurries from the kitchen.

65. INTERIOR. DOWNSTAIRS OFFICE/HALL. DAY.
MILLIE puts the field glasses back in their case on a shelf. As she turns to go back into the hall a spiral of gauze or thin paper moves past the door, a few inches off the ground, spinning along the hall.

66. INTERIOR/EXTERIOR. HALL/ FRONT OF HOUSE. DAY.
MILLIE looks to see what the spinning object was. There is no sign of anything. She goes to the front door which is open and steps outside to look. She sees GREG's head and shoulders peeping up over the roof of the Transit van which has replaced the wrecked Range Rover – it looks as though he is walking and has gained a couple of feet in height. MILLIE gasps at the sight. And then MAT emerges from behind the Transit with GREG on his shoulders. MAT seems not to feel GREG's considerable weight and carries him with ease.

MAT: (To Millie) I know – you thought God had touched him (Leans his head back as far as it'll go to look out the top of his eyes at Greg)

MILLIE: (Shaking her head) Didn't know what to . . .

MAT: (Booming) Well, not yet, but soon, maybe, who knows, let's hope . . .

MILLIE: (Fervent) Yes, yes, let's

GREG: My dinner ready Sugarpie?

MILLIE: (Astonished) Yes . . . yes, it's keeping hot for you

MAT and GREG march to the door

67. INTERIOR. KITCHEN. DAY.
GREG is just finishing his steak and potatoes at the kitchen table. MILLIE is wearingly scrubbing an oven dish

GREG: Lovely . . . bit on the dry side but very tasty. More

MILLIE: (Looking up from sink) Eh?

GREG: More. I want more. M..O..R..E

MILLIE: (Surprised) There isn't . . . that's all I got

GREG wheels himself to fridge and opens it

GREG: What's this then (Takes a plate with four lamb chops from fridge) Dog food?

MILLIE: It's tonight's supp . . .

GREG: I'll have it now

MILLIE: But what are we goin' to have for . . .

GREG: Nip out, can't you. You can nip out . . . (Millie takes the plate of chops, shrugging) An' curly kale with it. Lots o' curly kale

MILLIE: (Incredulous) *Kale?*

GREG: (Truculent) Well greens then. What greens you got?

MILLIE: You don't eat greens

GREG: Do now. Mat says that's the way to rebuild – meat and greens. Blood and chlorophyll. That's what I'm going to need for the effort it'll take.

68. EXTERIOR. OUTSIDE OF BUNGALOW. DAY.

MILLIE, wearing Wellingtons and messy clothes, is walking towards the house with a basket full of eggs that she has just gathered from the chicken run. On the lawn in front of the bungalow KIKI is doing cartwheels and acrobatic leaps that she has clearly been taught by MAT. GREG is sitting on MAT'S shoulders eating a large rib of beef on the bone, family joint size. It is rare and blood is dripping on to MAT'S forehead and face and down on to his torso – he is wearing his shorts as usual.

69. INTERIOR. SITTING ROOM/HALL. DAY.

MILLIE goes from hall into sitting room calling as she does so

MILLIE: You finished, Greg?

In the sitting room GREG is asleep and snoring in his wheelchair. On the table in front of him are two empty serving dishes – one of them has a lamb's leg bone picked clean on it.

GREG stirs but doesn't wake. MILLIE picks up the plates and goes out of the room with them.

70. INTERIOR. KITCHEN. DAY.

MILLIE puts plates in the sink. MAT is outside window feeding carrots to a black Billy-goat with horns. He's in shorts. MILLIE ignores him and starts to wash up. MAT taps on the window

MAT: Can I have a sandwich please?

MILLIE: Help yourself

MAT comes in to the kitchen via back door, he goes to the fridge, gets out some sliced ham. He sits down at table and makes himself a sandwich with a couple of slices of cut bread.

MAT: You going to join me?

MILLIE: No . . . (Going to fridge) I'll just have a yoghurt

MAT: That's good for you. Can I have some?

MILLIE: (Sitting down) Sure. Plenty in there

MAT: (Eating his sandwich) Just a little of yours. I don't want a whole one (Millie makes to hand carton to him) You feed me (He gets up from his seat and kneels beside her)

MILLIE: (Faint laugh) Whatever next? (She dips her spoon in the yoghurt and holds it to his mouth. He eats)

MAT: Yummy scrummy Mummy

MILLIE: (Looks quizzically at him) More?

MAT: You *bet.* (She feeds him again) Delicious. Kiss me (Millie looks at him with amused disbelief then smiles and leans to kiss him. They kiss engrossedly)

71. INTERIOR. HALL/STAIRS. DAY.

MAT carrying MILLIE. She closes the door of the sitting room.

MILLIE: (Whispers) He's sound asleep

MAT: Don't worry about Greg (Ambiguous)

72. INTERIOR/EXTERIOR. BEDROOM. DAY.

We see the room from outside the house. MAT and MILLIE undressing each other upstairs and, immediately beneath, GREG sleeping. Then inside we see MAT and MILLIE on bed kissing and petting.

MILLIE: (Laughs at herself as though ridding herself of tension) You know what?
MAT: You tell me
MILLIE: I mean, what I thought about you . . .
MAT: I love you
MILLIE: Oh (Sighs rapturously)
MAT: I've always loved you
MILLIE: Oh Mat . . .
MILLIE: Ah (Mat enters her, they fuck in the best possible taste etc. Close ups of eyes, entwined limbs and so on. MAT on top)
MAT: Even when I didn't know you I loved you
MILLIE: Oh Mat, Mat – I want to feel you . . . oh yes Mat, yes, yes, Mat (MAT removes the pillow from beneath her head) Not in me Mat, not in . . . be careful . . . I don't take . . . not since
MAT: (About to come) It's all right Millie. It's all right Mama – this is one baby you're never going to start. (As he comes he pulls the pillow across her face and holds it there, collapsing on top of it. Millie struggles beneath it, then goes limp. MAT stands, moves his arms in butterfly-stroke movement, pulls on his shorts, goes to open window, sits on edge and does backward roll from it).

73. INTERIOR. SITTING ROOM/HALL. DAY.
GREG is still slumbering in the sitting room. There is a quick flash outside the window as though a massive bank of lights has been momentarily turned on and then off again. GREG wakes and unthinkingly gets up from his wheelchair, walks out into the hall, and starts to climb the stairs. We look down the stairs at him. He has a sly grin on his face.

74. EXTERIOR. BEACH. DAY.
The light is dazzling. MILLIE is naked. Poodles of many colours trot along beside her down to the shore. Out at sea a white sailed yacht has high flames coming from it. A fully dressed man is swimming towards the shore. When he gets close we

see that it is MILES. His long hair seems almost dry by the time he reaches MILLIE.

MILES: (Voice slightly vibrato) Pat, he said, as paternal . . . I didn't understand. (He takes her hand, they walk away from camera along the beach with the dogs bounding about. Music: 'White Light, White Heat'.)

1985

Could This Be Greatness?: A Story

I am Dewey Hyde, I swear that I am not making use of an alias. Now, whence my amusing eccentricities? And why should I, during the evening of my forty-second birthday, counting less than half a dozen grey hairs at my right temple and vainly neglecting to inspect the left, have breathed on the mirror which presented my face to me and have written in the ovaloid of condensation these words: 'I shall cause a son to be born'. Was some seed sown as I ran beside my hoop, as I sat bored and suffering in my hideously decorated nursery, or earlier still? Whilst I floated in my mother's womb (from which I was scraped by a surgeon who sang as he toiled: I've tried all I know to ease her but he'll have to come out just like Caesar)? Or . . .

My father, Ivan, was one of four boy quadruplets, the others – Igor, Ian and Innes. (The physician attending my grandmother failed to note which of the green-eyed monsterettes appeared first and Grandpa had a sense of humour.) In his thirty-third year Igor, believing himself to be a failure – even previous suicide attempts had been unsuccessful – raised a revolver to his forehead and didn't miss. Ian was noted for his habit of taking leave of those in whose company he found himself with the ambiguous and cryptic phrase, 'Off to spot a leopard.' Innes devoted his short life, which was ended by the unhappy conjunction of a banana skin and a falling coping stone, to the study of biographers' biographers. Is it to be found here, the key to me?

Or should I search amidst dusty recollections of my adolescence, of my first amours? Sad to relate, those ingots of biographical gold I might drop could prove to be counterfeit;

my memory is fickle, it often deceives me. I do remember that I was much fascinated by a sprightly doe-eyed creature called Iris, but now find her indistinguishable in my mind's eye, in her cream crêpe de chine, from Doris, heroine of the movie of the same name (played by an enchanting soubrette whose name was of a different ilk – Shirley? Pearl? Jean?). I could put snuffling sleuths further off the track by noting here the dates and establishments of my education, the names of tunes popular the year I lost my virginity, and the titles of my ten favourite books, a list I remember actually compiling for a plump and eminently desirable French girl, the route to whose heart I mistakenly believed to be through her head.

Such reminiscences are, I know, simply props, and hardly likely to reveal why I added to my inscription on the mirror, 'Such is my will.' Then with the steady steps of one well used to concealing drunkenness I made my way back to the table and those boring and intimate friends in whose company I had chosen to spend that very special evening. Later, in a dream of some kind, I recalled what I had written. I tried to put it from me, as I tried to put from me the bearded man on Plymouth Hoe who insisted that with the aid of his binoculars I would see New York. I lifted them to my eyes – sure enough a coastline was clearly visible, and there could be no mistaking the skyline which appeared to my right eye, though not to my left.

'How far is it?' I asked.

'Three thousand miles,' he replied casually.

That's fair enough, I thought, and gazed in wonder.

So I forgot my inebriate scrawl, it faded into insignificance along with other faintly embarrassing incidents of the same evening – Your right nipple, it sends a ripple right through me . . . A tear, crystal clear rolling down a cheek is the most exquisite sight that Man can behold . . . Informing a pompous idiot that he was my closest, oldest, most trusted friend. And it was not until some months later that my memory was jogged.

Bored, I had strayed far from these northern climes. One evening I entered an establishment called the Club Mi Boy,

on whose tiny stage I would witness, I was promised, a performance of the 'Flashing White Sergeant'. A beautiful Ethiopian, painted in coarse parody of a Caucasian, marched on stage to the seedy three piece's off key rendition of 'The British Grenadiers'. What he wore goes without saying. He strutted, mimed sloped arms, performed numerous left, right, and about turns, stood easy as a bayonet through a haystack (which bestial movement he simulated with undisguised relish) and climaxed with the exposure of his black, erect and very real member as the sweating orchestra played the final bars: 'There's none that can compare/With a British Grenadier'. That this party was neither British, nor grenadier, nor sergeant hardly dampened the enthusiasm of the moist lipped audience, who couldn't, even in the wildest flights of fancy, be mistaken for seekers after verisimilitude. But who was I . . . etc; for as I drew on a pipe so kindly offered by a new found friend (Did I know his friend in Regensburg?) something inside me stirred and I sprang from my seat and left.

Alas! I was unable, despite valiant and not altogether unpleasurable attempts, to inseminate any of those lithe and slightly formed youths who embraced not only myself but Islam. The Prophet, I realized with some degree of certitude, would not make his long awaited second appearance on account of, or rather, as a result of me. Hyde and Moslem, that's no game.

Sad, and sore too, it occurred to me as I stared at the sky – the stars are always so much closer in those latitudes – that whilst the course of Islam seemed irrevocably bound to remain unchanged, an altogether more prosaic faith, Christianity, might benefit from my attentions. Now whether the plan I formulated had any precedent, I don't know, but I suspect so – for why else the furtive night games of a monk and a spreadeagled nun beneath a cedar in the grounds of a dark priory? And whence else that peculiarly self satisfied and righteous glitter in the eye of an Anglican minister as he steps up to the altar to be joined in matrimony to a fanatical schoolteacher? And nobody could persuade me that Ignatius O'Reilly, a humble bookish priest of the Church of Rome, took

his drab and limp breasted housekeeper simply that he might experience that which he had so long railed against, which had so long been unknown to him.

No doubt about it, their intention had been the same as mine, to sire the son of God reborn. However, I intended to execute my whim (MY WILL) with a degree of ingenuity lacking in the frail and guilt ridden attempts of those men. I resolved that on March 25th I should fertilize the woman (to whom I shall refer as Our Lady) who was my perfect genetic complement; and she, with the Almighty's blessing, and if necessary, the inducements of a sympathetic gynaecologist, should give birth on December 25th to a baby boy of such startling beauty and magnetism that he could not help but be recognized as Our Lord. I, with characteristic modesty, would make no claim to be the Holy Ghost, but would hover in the background as Joseph, husband of Mary, did in the original true story, shrugging off the compliments of the world with a shy smile and pointing out that I had a whole heap of cabinets to join before I could say anything more about the miracle that had occurred. Perceptive commentators, however, would not be slow to recognize the truth of the matter and I would find myself the object of the world's adulation and wonder. Cripples shall fall at my feet in supplication, begging that the use of their limbs be restored . . . All people shall know my story.

Am I mad, or are my whims simply more fantastic than those of other men?

I pondered on the choice of Our Lady; I note that I say '*the* choice', that I should shun the personal article would appear to indicate that I was acting on behalf of something, you might say, bigger than myself – but really that's a question that doesn't concern me, for the purpose of my memoir is akin to that of a work of fiction – to describe, and most certainly not to analyse. And if the steps which I took to procure a suitable mother for my son, whose name I shall not mention, seem ridiculous, it is because an element of farce informed the whole of my enterprise; surely though, that's a statement of

the utterly obvious, but the last thing I want to appear is completely unselfconscious.

The Holy Ghost's racial origins remain a mystery. However, since my part in this little drama rolled the roles of Holy Ghost and Joseph into one, and Joseph was a native of the same village as his wife (St Luke 1, 28) so I considered it right that Our Lady should be one of my own people. I know that I lay myself open to charges of racialism and of fascism, but the Semitic myth which provided me with a model isn't entirely innocent on either count. Anyway everybody knows that Jesus Christ looked like a lad from Tuscany or Castile or Flanders.

Returning, not to that mirror on whose surface I had written so casually and so portentously (1500 miles to my north), but to another, whose slight vertical distortion caused some of the flesh on my cheeks and, more markedly, at the corners of my mouth to disappear, I made a close inspection of all the features of my face; once familiar with them I knew that I could not fail to recognize Our Lady when she appeared to me. This is what I found: a deep forehead on which the most pronounced lines were those two, possibly half an inch long, which ran vertically from the top of my nose, and in the bright light and black shadow of my dressing room looked as if they were continuations of my rather thin eyebrows, which are of almost uniform width the whole way from the bridge to the temples. My eyes, the tips of whose lashes meet those kindly brows above, are sunk deep in skeletal fashion and are of a colour which modesty prevents me from describing as liquid amber. Marked lines, of which I was proud during my adolescence (sign of decadence) run beneath them, and were they further protracted would meet the ends of the brows. The conjunction of three days' growth of beard and the singular lighting had the effect of producing not usually prominent cheekbones to a startling degree. I've invented many stories to explain the origin of the inch and a half long deadly white scar which forms a perfect crescent on my left cheek, and I'm tempted to fabricate some more exotic circumstances, but such distractions must be avoided, I am amorous of just one Lady

and no other, her name is Truth (alias Verity, alias Vera City). My dental health is good – and there they are, even and white and clean, to prove it. The lower lip is marginally fuller (what that adjective promises!) than the upper; for the first time ever I noticed that the right of the mouth turns down more than the left. From both its corners there descends, at angles of about sixty degrees to an imaginary line across the mouth, a deep crease. Now, the nose, THE nose. Pride of Hyde. Olfactory Wurlitzer. That great chisel and stone team, Mickey and Angelo couldn't have produced anything more perfect. It's just a pity that Father Ivan and Mother Angela (dead before I uttered my first yelp) should get the credit. Something I couldn't find was that slight streak of grey at the right temple which had previously marred the appearance of my otherwise consistently chestnut, straight, but never lank head of hair; could have been the light.

I hope that these few words about my face haven't given an impression of vanity, nor, I hope, have they been in vain; faced with a hundred men, who could fail now to recognize Dewey Hyde, who has gone to such elaborate lengths to present himself as he saw himself. And those who, with total confidence, can stand up and point and say: 'There he is, on the very left of the front row,' must surely be able to describe, down to the last hair in the nostril, those features which I sought as a perfect complement to my own. I had, I might add, no compunction in rejecting other guides to my match. Astrology, psychology and all other kinds of fashionable bunk, whose services might have been sought by lesser men, were of no use to me.

At a ball I spied a delightful masked girl child. Was my quest at an end? It had hardly begun, my feet might be on English soil, but my mind . . .

'Let me sweep you off your feet, take you away to a land of a thousand and one oases, of minarets without number . . .'

'Of,' she interrupted, 'countless callow boys, who'll open their plump cheeks for just the price of a fresh date.'

Watch her tongue, a sleek talker – I flatter her, an over developed child with a retentive memory for the rubies that

fall from others' lips. But such judgements are not made immediately. (The way I formed the 'B' of 'But' at the beginning of that sentence reminds me of the hand of one Modred Absalom, a private tutor, prone to elongated downstrokes, once engaged, out of sheer despair, by my poor father. Upon handing in his resignation just three days after first setting eyes on his delectable charge he advised Papa Hyde that I had the power of the Devil about me. Would that he could see me now.)

'I'd hardly extend such an invitation if the pleasure I sought was already laid on.'

'Laid down,' she corrected me.

So why did I bother to continue this interview with a party whose affected worldliness rendered her unsuitable for my serious purpose? Well, it was still only January, I had ten weeks in which to find Our Lady, and J . . . who stood before me smiling, seemed a desirable prop. Props: a precocious nymphet, a weakness for opium and carnivorous plants – whilst these appetites may not form the subject of my narrative it is as well to hint at their presence in the background to show that life went on just as usual.

'Wanna be a Saint?' was how I began one advertisement in the personal column of *The Times*, and 'Simulate Parthenogenesis,' another. Did they sound so fraudulent? They elicited few replies. Desperately (my precious nymph had risen to my bait, but had miraculously escaped unhooked; agents of an unmentionable organization were baulking traffic of my second love; a negligent window cleaner and the chill east wind had conspired together to kill my juiciest meat eating friends) I sought Her. I resorted to a monstrously thick casting directory of actresses; posing as Hyde Productions – the urgency of the matter, weeks slipping by as they do, but quicker, ruled out something more glamorous like Hyde and Sikh Films (that's a clue) – I wrote to the agents representing those darling young ingénues who might have proved worthy of my attentions. Without exception those canny men replied that they knew nothing of Hyde Productions, and that they doubted a) its existence, and b) that it was casting for a biblical epic (Our

Lord's Own Story). Evidently my requests were nothing out of the ordinary to those Babylonians who couldn't tell Dewey Hyde from a deviant. I consoled myself with the memory of that Adonis of my youth (whatever was his name? – the star of *The Lost Typhoon* – the definitive airship drama) whose downfall was engineered by the callous moguls of Hollywood. It was comforting to know that my dilemma wasn't without precedent.

After the night of a dream in which I found myself staring down on all the continents of Earth and granting to each in turn its share of trees, which looked like cedars but smelt like eucalypti, I rose, composed another advertisement, 'Romantic Hero seeks Heroine' (time was short and inspiration lacking), then strolled off to mail it. A sunny day, surprisingly warm for the time of year (February 17th), blossoms imminent, a look of spring in dogs' eyes and no need for an overcoat. I put the letter in a post box set in an orange brick wall, shut my eyes and blasphemously uttered a prayer and a voice called my name. Disappointing students of the supernatural, I turned, and there, not thirty feet away, beneath a leafless tree stood Vanbrugh Nash, whom I knew, with a woman I didn't know. I approached my near neighbour.

'Dewey, how *are* you?'

'I am fine, and you?'

'Oh, this first breath of spring has failed to bring colour to my sallow cheeks, but what can an oldster expect. Eleanor, I'm forgetting myself. Dewey, this is Mrs Cade.'

Mrs Cade was a good looking woman of about my age, we exchanged pleasantries, I reported on my recent travels, and parted with an invitation to dine that night.

Some time before 9 o'clock Vanbrugh introduced me to Our Lady. Did I recognize her immediately? Really I don't know. The encounter was as strange as it was marvellous; he opened the front door and ushered me into a large reception room. She turned towards me as Vanbrugh pronounced her name and continued:

'This is Dewey Hyde.'

'Dewey Hyde.' Her voice was extraordinary, she seemed not

to believe her ears. Almost at once she recovered herself, but not before her hand had made towards her offending mouth. Vanbrugh was evidently as intrigued as I by this reaction, the skin of his chin momentarily tightened.

What would, under normal circumstances, have been a pleasant dinner seemed interminable. It was only with great difficulty that I could eat anything, and I was forced to cite the advice of an imaginary Dr Aubrey King, who had forbidden me to drink alcohol. From haemophilia conversation turned to longevity and further. With an ivory pick Vanbrugh extracted a morsel from between his teeth and said:

'Were I offered immortality, I should decline it. I can think of nothing more insufferable.'

Till now she had spoken as little as I (neither Vanbrugh nor Mrs Cade had shown any sign of tiring), so imagine my joy at the words she spoke, at the voice, the meaning, the pitch, the inflections, the sentiment. She was at one with me.

'Among certain people there existed the belief that a first born son might achieve immortality by performance of a particular feat. Because the nature of this feat was unknown the boys fasted, fought wild beasts, drank poisoned water, submitted to flagellation quite prepared to risk their life to be granted everlasting life. One first born son took a wife who gave birth to daughter after daughter, but never to a son. He was scorned by his fellow men, who regarded his failure to produce a male heir as a sign of weakness. And his daughters, too, gave birth only to girl children. So it went on and he took further wives, but they bore him no sons either; and as he attained great age his people were becoming gradually depleted of men. Thus he achieved immortality through his failure to father a son; he remains quite potent and will live forever amidst succeeding generations of women.'

Vanbrugh's and Mrs Cade's reactions seemed to me to be ridiculous. How could they doubt? How they could doubt! I could not wait to be with her.

Had there been a dagger at hand I might have thrust it into Vanbrugh's heart when, as he rose from the table, he smiled at me and said: 'We'll have a game of chess, Dewey.'

I nodded weakly. Mrs Cade said that she would play the winner. Our Lady stood watching as we set up the pieces on an exquisite blue table, the legs of which depicted the legs of Vanbrugh's third wife, a trapeze artist. Then she wandered to the far end of the room, opened a cigarette box, lit an O'Keefe's King Size, and lay back on an enormous sofa. I moved recklessly, Vanbrugh's fourth move won the game.

'Fool's mate!' he cried with delight, then, 'What's the matter with you Dewey? You weren't even trying, you wanted to lose. What kind of opponent is that?' I muttered some feeble excuse and rose. He laughed, 'T'es amoureux, mon vieux.' He stopped short of nudging me. I shrugged and he called: 'Eleanor, your turn to meet the master. Dewey found it hard to concentrate, I'm afraid he's been made a fool of.' He chuckled, I smiled at her as she walked to the table.

Unburdened, I walked slowly down the long room and sat down beside her.

'There have,' she said, 'been some curious notices in *The Times* of late. I've replied pseudonymously to every one.' She paused and smiled at me. 'You do have a large store of euphemisms, don't you Dewey.'

'Why didn't you come? You must have been convinced.'

'I wanted to see how persistent you were. There are still another five and a half weeks you know. Excuse me just for a moment. Don't run away.'

I didn't. After thirty seconds I began to wonder if I should ever see her again. She stood above me and handed me a sheet of pale green notepaper. I read:

'My cousin Elizabeth is already heavy with child; soon I shall be too. Saint Mary the Virgin.'

I gazed in astonishment. I gaped in wonder.

'You would,' she said, 'have received this on the 24th of March, and the next day I would have appeared to you.'

'Thank God, thank God I've found you. I know that by then I would have been able to think of nothing but the pistol in my desk.'

A quiet ceremony; Vanbrugh and Eleanor Cade were the

only guests. The three weeks between wedding and consummation we spent in prayer. Through the long nights we played Scrabble. Through the long night of March 25th the Holy Ghost visited Our Lady.

At the beginning of Our Lord's second month in the womb I engaged a resident nurse, Frances, an energetic girl who habitually munched nasturtium leaves. One day (May 29th) as I was returning from a brief expedition she greeted me hysterically. She grabbed my arm and shrieked:

'She's going to kill herself!'

'Where is she?'

'In your bedroom.'

The door was locked. I flung myself against it, it didn't give.

'Open this door,' I said quietly. A few seconds elapsed, then the key turned in the lock.

'Don't come in till I say.'

When, after a further interval, I entered she was sitting naked on the dressing table. In her right hand she held a .38 calibre revolver, pointed at her stomach.

'I've been playing Russian roulette with our child.' She let out a stupid, crass giggle.

'You're mad. Give me that gun.'

'You are mad, Dewey Hyde. Father of God, father . . . You're sad. Do you know how many children there are born every year on December 25th, thousands, millions. And it's only the approximate date of Jesus's birth.'

'Heretic.'

'You're pathetic. Suppose that this is a daughter.'

'You lack faith.'

'She probably won't be born on Christmas day anyway.'

'I'll see to it that it is.'

'You'd cut him out,' she screamed, and squeezed the trigger, the snout of the short barrel resting in the folds of her flesh. Empty chamber; I flung myself across the room, she fired and again. I wrenched the pistol from her hand and threw it on the bed.

'Don't ever do that again. That is my son. You evil bitch.'

She was kneeling on the floor. After a few moments she

stood up and wrapped a dressing gown around her. 'Easter,' she said slowly, 'came and went.'

'I choose to exalt He that will be born, not mourn He that died.'

'I thought that they were one and the same.'

I dared not strike her, it could have been that chance blow that kills. Smiling (had she seen me raise my clenched fist?) she taunted me with her desire to contract syphilis so that her child might be born diseased. It dawned on me gradually that she was determined that I should never see my son. My claims that he would be immortal met with cruel laughter.

When I awoke from the barbituric dreams of the night which followed I found that she had gone. Our Lady had packed her bags and left.

I had anticipated a union which would be, quite simply, joyous. The reality – so like that of any other marriage of a middle aged waster and a fickle, impressionable girl, so like that of any other close contact with those of my species – was ghastly. (A descent into a realistic report of its every moment, of my every tormented hour was the only way I knew of conveying the horror of those few months.) The nurse left a week later; her way of showing me that she knew Our Lady wouldn't return. I often smoked twenty pipes a day, and entered a strange world of beasts. I sought refuge in the blandest of children's books; once I toyed with the idea of reading something which corresponded to my state of mind, some monumental epic of pessimism. But I possessed copies of no such works, and were I to stroll into a bookshop and demand them I knew that as soon as the door had closed behind me the arty girl assistant would turn to the gay young man assistant and say:

'There goes a man with a broken spirit.'

'So-o-o-o sad.'

Yesterday I received the following wire from the British Embassy in Istanbul: DEEPLY REGRET INFORM YOU YOUR WIFE KILLED IN URFA EARTHQUAKE STOP FURTHER INFORMATION SOON AS POSSIBLE. I'd heard something about the disaster when I'd inadvertently switched on TV

News. I went out into the hall and picked up a bundle of unread newspapers. The earthquake at Urfa on the Turkish and Syrian border had claimed fifteen thousand lives.

Today is my forty-third birthday. Just a year ago I wrote in the condensation on a mirror . . . (Dissolve through close up of Hyde to mirror, the words written on it gradually disappear.)

No doubt Our Lady had, in her own way, regained her faith and was travelling to the Holy Land? It doesn't matter, for my son will not be born.

It must have been a very jealous God who saw fit to take fifteen thousand lives just to prevent the birth of one child.

My revolver rests on the desk in front of me. In a moment I shall raise it to my . . . But wait, what's that which is trying to squeeze itself between my ribs?

1970

Perfect Portrait: A Story

The first blurred signal to my conscious from its close companion beneath my luxuriant chestnut locks was received as the aeroplane on which I was travelling, seated just forward of its gleaming port wing, descended over the grey and red roofs of Mérignac, the northern suburb of Bordeaux, in which that city's airport is situated. Seat belt tight about my stomach (causing a rush of blood to the brain?) it occurred to me that I, Patrick Ide, might with one masterful coup put an end to the life of he whose rushing seed had fertilized my mother almost thirty-three years previously, and so possess his thousands long before nature might deign to offer them to me. And then? My habits are by no means extravagant, though I do enjoy an ample standard of living – but it was not to any selfish end that I intended to employ those fresh crisp jewels, that (hopefully) five figure number in welcoming black type. Modestly I wished to open a restaurant unsurpassed anywhere in this world of worldly men whose ambitions are generally of a far more grandiose nature than my own.

I have always regretted that the names of the greatest chefs of the world (Dietriche, Careme, Francatelli, etc.) are not as keenly remembered, recounted, lisped and shouted as those, say, of blundering statesmen, incompetent marshals and gangster popes. Oh all you Borgias, and you too Bonaparte, patron of that seer Durand who created Chicken Marengo from the sparse furnishings of a cupboard in a hard sprung wagon on the plains of Piedmont, how the masters of the one true art served you. And whence else the stunning banquets of Taleb III, whither else the deer dropped by the sure arrow of John IV (The Inconstant)? Shamefully I'll admit that I too am

frequently ignorant of the name proudly borne by this Rabelaisian giant of below stairs, or by that mirror of his master's taste. Sadly I have come to realize that celebrity is granted only to bomb throwers and rapists, and that these same men might, in quieter moments, be good strudel makers or confectioners of genius is of no interest to the moron public.

But let me, as the broker with the pencil thin moustache once said, hasten to reassure you: I don't want to be famous. So why, then, such a lament? Had my father not been a snob I should never have uttered it for there might not have grown in me a fiery loathing for the consul who neglects to praise the saucier or for the screeching actress who lets a soufflé cool while she finishes a cigarette. A cigarette. Back to Father and his snobbism, which was of neither the cultural nor the class kind, but far simpler, far baser, founded as it was on celebrity. Such a patron of the famous and infamous I've never met; countless were the times when, as a child, I was dragged from the kitchen (where I was busy showing early promise) to meet this diplomat, that magnate, Heidi Maxwell the aviator, or Erich Berg the convicted procurer, who had he gone undetected would never have seen his name in print nor, consequently, my parents' dinner table. I was twice photographed with Henrietta (formerly Henry) Monck, once in his Lagonda and on the other occasion beside her pool. In the latter snap the apparently disembodied arm creeping in from the left belongs to none other than Chérie Glasse, an actress of dubious ability and similar reputation whose frequent presence was suffered by Father simply because he believed that her name might become attached to some sonorous scandal.

Amongst these people, whom, with the sure eye and sceptical mind of a child, I judged dangerously stupid and unremittingly boring, my father had only one true friend, John (later Sir John) Ash, the actor, whose limelit, hamlit road to the top he'd recorded conscientiously on canvas – John as Hal, John as Macbeth, and many more besides, with flashing knives before the forum, rosy balconies and burnished thrones; and as he grew old and stately John as Shylock, Prospero and Lear. In all of these portraits John was viewed

from a point somewhere wide of his left thigh, thus strengthening his chin, hiding the puffier eye and adding those few inches for want of which the poor man spent his whole life compensating. In this vain and serious thespian my father saw himself. Not only were their ideals, aspirations and appetites alike; they resembled each other to such an extraordinary degree that they were frequently taken for brothers and, on one grotesque occasion, for each other, for despite the one's theatrical training and practice their voices and their manner of deportment were almost indistinguishable.

Though he never revealed it to me I am as certain as can be that my father cherished the hope that I might follow in the steps of this man; he often hinted that the mediocre comedy (I was a fat child) performances I gave in school plays augured well for a bright theatrical future. Previously he had done his utmost to convince me that I had his talent as a painter, but we both knew that it wasn't so. Besides, had I possessed the ability to conjure up clouds on canvas or orchards in oil I should not have made use of it – to do so would have been to condemn myself to a life as Son of Lawrence Ide. He owed his considerable reputation and success as an artist to his twin gifts as plagiarist and charmer, rather than to imaginative feats and though I do not wish to slight his achievement I cannot help but note that to my strictly untrained eye his work seemed derivative and facile and, in the case of his many portraits (I admit that this speaks well for his prowess with the brush), grossly flattering to his celebrated and frequently very ugly subjects. Royalty, bankers, politicians, littérateurs, eminent sailors, soldiers and ship owners – all had sat for him and paid handsomely for the questionable pleasure. (He was apt to throw those fits which his delighted clients expected from him as a temperamental artist.) But never once was the man who posed in front of his mahogany easel a chef; that Sir William Orpen RA had once painted the Chef de L'Hôtel Chatham, knife in hand, chubby cutlet before him, went unremarked, and that I should wish to pursue such a career stunned and infuriated him. 'Cook,' he screamed in a voice an octave higher than normal, in the manner of an elderly actress

declaiming the word handbag, closed the magazine through which he had been browsing, stood up, surveyed me with an air of reasoned hate and made an unhurried exit. To almost any other métier he would grudgingly have granted his approval, for every student musician, every aspiring academic may one day achieve a certain degree of fame, even if their names won't be spoken by the tongues of thousands like those of footballers and felons; but – and I might be writing his words for him – whoever heard of a well known cook?

I alighted from the plane; soothed by a balmy breeze, deafened by engines at the ready, with a grin on my face and a plot in my head I strolled towards arrival, negotiated that hurdle without incurring penalty points, wandered to my waiting car, which faithfully responded to my first touch and ignoring the call of home and hearth set off along the boulevard which surrounds the ancient city where I lived. In the leafy suburb of Le Bouscat I stopped at the Café-Bar de Fondaudège, ate a sandwich of indifferent sausage and drank a Pelforth 45. Amidst the traffic of late afternoon I drove on through the increasingly drab environs past a factory that manufactures sprung saddles, around a roundabout, along a stretch of autoroute, parked my car down a slip road and walked along the pavement beside that four lane, concrete monster which, if the fates so will, bears all those who travel on her to Carbon Blanc, Angoulême and all places beyond, between and before them; but first those lone adventurers in their metal hutches must cross the Garonne. And it was up the incline towards the five hundred feet high suspension bridge that I was walking now. How I don't know, but I was aware the instant there was no land beneath the structure which supported me, on which I kept my eyes fixed, the lines between the slabs making and breaking the monotony, every thirty or so paces glancing the bottom of a lamp standard. As I reached the middle of the bridge I raised my head, took in the silver thread of the river, glimpsed a launch which was no bigger than my thumbnail, espied the spires amidst the smoke and almost vomited from vertigo. The bridge swayed in the wind which

blew the collar of my coat tight against my ears and forced my hands to clutch at the smooth parapet before me. Now, I thought, I am as near to God as I shall ever be, for with murder in mind and blood on the brain I cannot reach Him save by flinging my body and being floating and screaming into the rippling river below me. Such a damp destiny, I knew, was not mine; so caught between nature with her mighty gusts and man with his whining and deadly machines, and deeply influenced by both I determined to put into action the plan that had come to me half an hour before and to overcome those barriers, moral, legal and sentimental, that the world has placed between a man such as I and his duty.

As I drove home along a sleepy walled street a large and dirty alsatian with its nose in the gutter walked slowly into the road some thirty yards ahead of me engrossed in a succulent scent. I depressed the brake pedal but then glanced in the rearview mirror, saw that there were no cars in sight, accelerated and must have been travelling at about forty miles an hour when the bumper struck the beast with a resounding thud.

I lived in a dark and cool second storey apartment which I rented furnished from an aged and ailing widow, Madame Georgelin, who inhabited the ground and first floors, territory through which I sped with a minimum of sound lest the good lady should venture into the corridor from the shrine to the past that was her living room and regale me with tales of Deauville, her native town, where one September evening in 1911 she had met the young Breton engineer she was to marry, and of their palmy lavish life in Martinique where he had worked in the service of his country and had contracted the disease from which he eventually expired in the last year of the Second World War which had already claimed the life of their only son Alain, a dark haired, wild eyed and – to judge from the expression adopted in the many photographs of him that his mother cherished – rather surly young man. This house of memories stood on Rue Judaïque. Today, although I know every seedy inch of that street, I cannot help but recall the picture which sprang to mind – of a knife thrust into an

orthodox diamond dealer – the first time I heard pronounced what I must shamefully admit seemed a very sinister name, redolent too, amazingly, of apaches, usury, and a tight garter glimpsed through the slit of a skirt. (I might add that the demi monde through which I dragged myself in my attempt to exorcize those irritating inhibitions which might have conspired to frustrate my design was by no means as picturesque as that of my fantasies.)

Frequently varying my route I walked every day to work at Chez Dubarre where I was employed as master chef. That I, a scion of Albion, should have aspired to and achieved such heights did not go unnoticed among those with tongue on the brain and brains on their tongues. Behind my back which is all ears I was accused of having usurped a position that rightfully belonged to a son of France. Dour and serious critics, however, grudgingly and gradually accepted me and, not altogether jokingly, opined that my blood was not entirely English. I tend to agree with them.

Every Saturday night Martine, the smiling svelte bookkeeper, would accompany me home. After consuming a couple of whiskies, a plate of very dry biscuits and gossiping unanimatedly about our mutual acquaintances we would make love a couple of times and fall into a peaceful sleep till mid morning. Once a month I would drive her to Créon where her father owned a provisions store and would pass my day playing jokari, and engaging in drear conversation with her arthritic mother; other Sundays were spent beside the sea at Arcachon, near the lagoon which bears the name of that singularly tasteless little town or with her schoolfriend Françoise and her husband Hervé who lived a blissful bigoted life at Blaye, he as garagist, she producing and rearing brats. After these trips Martine would sometimes return with me to my apartment and the carnal circus would recommence; more usually I would drive her to Place Hugo where she lived in a fourth floor walk up which I never visited.

The day after my return from Paris, the day after I had taken my momentous and heroic decision, Martine was full of questions about the ceremony at which I had been appointed

Chevalier de L'Institut de Dégustation Gourmande. She was delighted that the self deprecating story I had told about an Englishman faced with a plate of ceps had been well received and was further thrilled that I should have been congratulated on my modesty and bearing. She squeezed my arm and brushed my well turned ear with her lips and asked me if I'd met any nice girls. Knowing just what she wanted to hear I lied and described at length the hot night I'd passed mingling with a nimble, young and precocious whore to whom a fawning acquaintance had introduced me. After some unusually adventurous activity I lay beside Martine bathed in our sweat staring at the four parallelograms (each one corresponding to a window pane) on the ceiling above me and thought of that dead alsatian in that sunny dead street, of the flies about its eyes, of the sizeable dent in the chrome nearside bumper of my car, and of my ability to conjure up at will countless different images of the expiring beast without experiencing even the faintest pangs of guilt. But try as I might I could not transform the dog into Lawrence Ide who persistently refused to appear to me save as a smiling and urbane host welcoming a faceless guest beneath a lamplit porch.

On the terrace of a busy café, beneath a carmine and white parasol, on a wrought metal chair sat I watching groups of insolent looking youths, all dressed alike, slouching and shuffling with their thumbs in their trouser tops. Every one a car thief, I mused uncharitably, every one a potential killer; with brains like peas they'd execute with ease their mothers, brothers, sisters, aunts, and fathers, especially their fathers . . . Oh this morning sun, this salt sea breeze playing havoc with my mind. Martine sat staring from behind her large dark glasses at the world going past five to an open coupé. In her left hand she held a packet of cigarettes and a silver lighter (learned from films – the mark of the cosmopolitan) and in her right an apéritif which she sipped slowly and silently. From the table between us I picked up a copy of the only French newspaper that is of any interest to me, struggled with its billowing pages and glanced gleefully at the headline: Le

Destin Tragique d'Yvonne (22) de Galais (Indre et Loire), and at the story that followed about another small town girl caught up in the web of the big city. I delighted in steeping myself in such lore, greedily swallowing large doses of sado-eroticism, blackmail and murder. The centre pages carried an in depth report on the latest of the long line of deaths in swimming pools; this week's victim was the son of a Swiss beverage baron. Scenes from the boy's short and wasted life surrounded a large photograph of his rigid body covered by a blanket which had absorbed some of the blood escaping from his lower abdomen, into which his jealous fiancée, the now hysterical Ava, had plunged a diver's knife. What thought had she given to the rank offence she knew she must commit? Sadly none; coming upon him beside the moonlit pool as he dallied with a servant she had drawn the weapon from the rubber sheath in which it lay near the hapless couple and had lunged wildly as they attempted to cover their shame. Such fiery show, such impetuousness, such foolhardy extravagance was not for me; bedevilled as I was by nightmares of a courtroom, a clock and a masked executioner I had resolved to strive in the discharge of this scheme, as of all others, for perfection.

As great chefs go unsung so too do great murderers – those who with stealth, cunning and a shadowy cape vanquish space and trick time to cover their dainty steps. How I wished that I could convince myself that I might join their ranks; how I wished that I could peer into the minds of my precursors – those ill favoured sons of different fathers and different ages – and find there the doubts and qualms, the fear and gloom which I was coming to know so well. I further longed to be able to persuade myself that it was a simpler matter to take the life of a man at whose hands I had suffered than that of a stranger who would not enter my life or my sights till I squeezed the trigger, with whom, as he fell clutching his gaping wound, there would pass no part of me and whose death would have no bearing on the day to day existence of a punctilious and humble cook. Such attempts at self deception had, sadly, no chance of success; for wasn't the man I meant to kill the same man who had crouched beside my green and

cream yacht adjusting its sails that it might glide swiftly and gracefully across a limpid pond, who had woken me before dewy dawn to gather mushrooms, who had hurled me high and soaring into the air, who had held my trembling hand as I contemplated a cobra? And I knew that with his death these and a thousand other lively canvases would change hopelessly and tragically into terrible documents testifying against me and proclaiming my basely ignoble ingratitude. To my quiet surprise I realized that I had formed a strong sentimental attachment to all the people I ever was and that my father had been a firm and loyal friend to many of them.

What a very slippery path I had to tramp, what astounding possibilities lay ahead of me, what cautious voices warned me not to tread this taut tense line. But not Martine's, her lilting and occasionally hysterical soprano – the servant of her darting tongue and, more rarely, of her quirkish mind – pronounced no judgements when, over lunch, I broached the subject of patricide. As I picked at a plate of Ris de Veau à la Mode de Nevers (in which I could detect a trace of olive oil – ground nut oil, with its subtler flavour, must be used in the preparation of this dish), she recounted the plot of a film she had once seen which concerned the dilemma facing a young man bent on murdering his vile father, a dairy worker. The twist in the tale concerned the boy's realization on the eve of his crime that he could only go through with it if he hated himself as much as he hated his father. Drunk, despairing and wilful he broke into the jam factory where he worked and castrated himself with the aid of a bottling machine, then bloody, sobbing and contorted made his way home and there bludgeoned to death his sleeping sire. The drama, set in an unspecified Eastern European country, culminated in the poor youth being sentenced to death not, as the innocent spectator might have expected, for murder but for abuse of state machinery. Martine relished this irony, was touched by the banal moral and asked why I had developed an interest in so recondite a subject. I shrugged, dropped both shoulders absolutely simultaneously and commented on the similarity in colour of her nail varnish and the old Vieux Cahors she held

in a glass before her. Flattered, realizing the true compliment intended, she extended that same hand to mine and asked whether I really wanted to go to England for my imminent summer holiday. I muttered something about filial duty, uttered a grunt registering distaste for the subject, joked about murdering my father (ah was I rash, yes I was reckless), and expressed once more my oft proffered opinion of Ouessant in August.

Lingering, tarrying in dalliance beneath lovely scented pines, we told each other more bestial tales and Martine, to my surprise and delight, announced shyly that she knew a man who often boasted that he was a murderer. I shivered and drew my elbows close to my ribs. She smiled like a cat aboard a tree and I leaned back against the furrowed bark of one and she leaned pressing against me; round my neck, across my jaw and down my tender throat she ran the jewelled daggers at the tips of her fingers. I shut my eyes to the cheetah who devoured me, I writhed, imprisoned and loving it, as my fierce captor drew blood from the willing pores above my carefully ironed collar, as she drank it, warm and revitalizing, as, like in the dream of dreams, she gorged upon my gorge, licking with her rough tongue all that her fangs coaxed out.

Thus refreshed, with recreation done, with wind in our hair and eyes, we travelled speedily back along the flat, dark and shimmering road to Bordeaux. Where had she met, how had she found this mutter, murmur, murder, murderer. Seek the villain. That was my game and I was prepared to bend the rules to win. No need. He was, she said, often to be found at the aptly named Café St Quentin.

I plunged, I fell, my ears all but burst and then I landed, bottom squarely and roundly on a cane back chair, midst the murk of the lower depths. Literally it was light in the Café St Quentin and with the greatest of ease I could see Clovis. He was by no means an unpleasant sight – this smooth skinned man who had strangled a Casablancan barber, a Berber whore and a Dutchman with a ring in his nose, the loci of his crimes having been a water garden, an outside staircase and a tiled chamber. Son, he claimed, of a Zouave and a Viennese

stenographer, there was no mark on his face, no point in his eyes that might betray his slaughterous past. Martine had introduced him to me in the small hours one rainy night and I had taken to frequenting the garish bar where he collected money from his half dozen girls, played pinball and drank Suze. He was polite, sometimes arrogant and often charming – he had very white even teeth – and despite his predisposition towards confessions of an obviously self incriminating nature was infuriatingly difficult to get to know. At any previous time of my life I am certain that I should not have persevered in my attempts to plumb the mucous well behind his eyes which were, incidentally, large and brown, I should not have so willingly suffered humiliating defeat at the hands of a tyro chess player, should not have been so easily drawn to laughter at coarse and pointless jokes. Nor should I have tolerated his base, heartless opinion of men and their motives; but I was living testimony to the accuracy of his observations and could not dare deny their truth.

One night as I rose to leave, Clovis, with Berthe on one arm and sallow Jeanne on the other, asked me where I was off to. 'Home,' I replied. 'Come back to my place,' he invited me. Of course I accepted: how could I have denied myself the opportunity to dart behind the mask, to . . . ? I ran my hands caressingly over the polished arms of the chair he had signalled me to take, I stared at the electric fan and at a bronze figurine on the marble mantel, my feet explored the grey and blue patterned carpet beneath them. But these objects were quite innocent, yielding no clue to the identity of their owner – they would have been no different had he been a porter or a midwife. When I too can call myself a killer, I wondered, will my face, my shoes, my bed, my golden watch strap tell on me? Will fickle diners detect in my menus, in my preparation of crayfish or quiches the hands of a . . . ?

My attention returned to my host. I found him slouched over a huge plump cushion with a smile on his face. He watched with curious indifference the gruesome and unnatural performance of Berthe who drew her skirt up to her waist and slid into her white thigh the needle at the base of a

syringe. I bit my tongue and his came lolling out as a cloudy river of blood displaced the morphine she had so casually injected. All the while Jeanne was carrying out an elaborate manicure designed apparently to render sharper than they already were her vermillion nails. Then she stood up and made to go out of the room. Clovis spoke to her quickly and loudly in Arabic. Without a word she sat down beside Berthe and put an arm around her drugged and smiling friend. 'They're good girls,' said Clovis, 'good girls.' He nodded. 'They're happy too.' This wasn't what I wanted to hear, this most certainly was not what I wanted to see – sunny childish faces, smatterings of good cheer and a proud paternal pimp. Now that I'd glimpsed blood I thirsted for more. No chance at all, I realized, of shadowy figures bursting through the door brandishing guns, with glinting blades between their teeth and rubied hilts at right angles to their sunken, scarred and nighttime cheeks. Was that an asp I saw on Clovis's shoulder across the smokey room? No, no it wasn't, it was simply a length of braid that Berthe had placed about his neck; nor was the black flex of a table lamp a garotte. He spoke of recent dockyard troubles and was peculiarly anxious to convince me that in such matters his sympathies lay with the employers. Doubtless he led a gang of toughs waylaying earnest and militant unionists in the rat infested alleys near the wharves, theatening their timid wives and winging their children with stolen cars. Wrong once again – he was simply out to show me that he liked to think of himself as belonging to the managerial class and he yearned for the sort of respectability that I possessed.

Ill at ease in this world hesitantly I asked questions of a naïve and quasi-sociological nature. Was Berthe an addict? Did she resent her mother? Did she enjoy her work? Had she suffered from a strict Catholic upbringing? Was it possible – could she have been a novice? Was her father a cripple? Was he? Was she? Did you? And have you? A hundred Trojans couldn't have held my tongue and I just wished that its roots would tire and wither; I knew that this was no way to conduct myself in, to become part of the urban twilight, where actions

speak so much louder than rarely uttered words, whose stoic walls aren't to be breached by throwing all tight lipped chaff to the wind.

Some time later, by choice or by chance, I happened not to speak during a period of about ten minutes. 'Clovis,' I said, I had risen and was easing myself down beside him, 'Why Clovis did you commit those murders? And were you ever afraid that you might be caught?' Squatting on my haunches I did not expect, most surely did not count on my questions being met with laughter. 'Why? Why does anybody take another's life? Hate, jealousy, revenge, love, fear . . . Or like me, I lost my temper. And when I lose my temper it is not I, Clovis, who acts, but some wild beast inside me.!' Gazing at me rather threateningly he indicated his chest and prodded the breast bone with his left forefinger. Was it there that he kept the savage? Truly I was past caring, for I realized that Clovis's crimes were not the intricately planned and breathtakingly executed masterworks the like of which I wished to emulate, dreamed of surpassing. But what, oh by what weighted turn of what weighted dice was it that this seedy and pathetic procurer should have remained undiscovered? Simply because he was a man incapable of controlling his hideous urges his victims had been poor souls whose only connection with their destroyer was at the very moment of, and those leading up to, their deaths. No clues were yielded by address books or known acquaintances. Clovis had nothing to gain by his deeds save the release of an unbearable tension within him.

And so at the feet of a psychopath sat I. How could I thus have demeaned myself? A variety of adages and songs on the subject of learning from mistakes, venturing fools treading and gaining the power of angels coursed through my mind. I didn't bother to cast a hand behind my back to feel if I'd grown wings – no need for extravagant gestures – but I rose, politely thanked Clovis for his hospitality and was on the point of bidding him farewell when his long fingers clamped themselves around my forearm. 'Surely you don't have to be off so soon, stay a while.' I could detect a whine in his voice. He

resents my rejection of him, he's bitterly offended that I should not have fallen irretrievably beneath his spell and that I should feel free to go about my business, that I should value my bed and my dreams as highly as his company. Such were the thoughts that attacked me as I balanced uncertainly, one foot in midair; the insistence of his grip and his expression of hurt child combined to convince me that I should not yet depart. I also recalled a phrase he had used in describing the death of Hassan, his first victim, and so sat down again. 'That's better,' he said; not so, it was far, far worse than before, and it wasn't until almost two hours later – two hours of unrelieved boredom and disgust – that I could bring myself to say that I should be on my way. I shook hands with my now smiling host, whose two women had long since drifted into their nightmares, and made an unhurried and apparently calm exit.

The dark figures who scuttled down alleys or lingered menacingly in doorways, their faces illuminated intermittently as they inhaled their no doubt drugged cigarettes, induced in me a feeling of vast superiority as I passed along the sodium lit streets; they also scared me, anyone of them might pounce, mistaking my gait for that of a double crossing fence, and it was little comfort to know, as I surely did, that he would feel no remorse as he turned the body beneath him with his shoddily cobbled shoe to discover that it wasn't Jean-Marie, his former accomplice, who had excreted the jet of blood that had stained his shirt but me, poor dead Patrick, whose name he would learn from my bulging wallet before consigning it, minus money, to a restaurant's dustbins.

Lying in wait was a different fate; I accomplished a safe and quick return, walking along the middle of those streets which formed my route. At five o'clock or thereabouts as a fresh dawn was breaking on this side of this most wonderful of all planets I was reaching in my pocket for my front door key when an anxious voice uttered my name. I raised my head and Martine appeared from somewhere. Weary of company I must have scowled instead of registering, more fittingly, surprise or joy for she seemed rather perplexed when I curtly grunted hullo and in a sorry voice she told me how her

landlord had given her notice to quit as a result of a misdemeanour of an ever changing and, to this day, unclear nature. 'So please Patrick can I stay till I find somewhere new? I have nowhere to go. Would you wish me to spend the night on the streets or in a derelict house full of foul breathed tramps?'

I didn't hesitate for a moment; with a broad flourish I thrust an arm about her shoulders and, not stopping to consider the generosity of my gesture, said that she could stay as long as she liked. What moist eyes looked up at me with gratitude and affection, what willing hands (mine) clasped the handles of her two cases and bore them briskly and quietly through the hall and up the stairs.

From the kitchen where she was preparing some tea I heard her emit a muffled cry. Putting down the black satin mask I had been fondling I entered that room to find her cowering, her hands gripping the edge of the sink, an expression of terror on her face. With her nose – or was it her chin and her eyes? – she indicated the uncluttered table. 'What's the matter?' I asked her as I posed on the threshold anxious and irritated. With a strangely contorted gesture she pointed once again to the table. And there, admirably complementing the grained, scrubbed surface, was a russet coloured creepy crawling towards a chipped saucer. 'That,' I said, 'is a woodworm.' It probably was too. 'And,' I continued, in a voice sharp as the teeth which formed the words, 'it's not likely to maim.' 'Oh I'm sorry Patrick, how I'm sorry, but . . .' I forget now which set of extenuating circumstances she pleaded in her defence on that occasion; so varied and fantastic were the excuses she quietly tendered after her frequent lapses into near delirium that I can no longer pair the whimpering descriptions of mishaps during childhood or early adolescence (when she was apparently a favoured delicacy of every mackintoshed clerk – or ought it to be bereted peasant? – in the neighbourhood), with the coarse, ludicrous and distinctly unappealing outbursts that preceded them.

Preoccupied with the hopefully imminent demise of my father I scarcely noted that she was making not the slightest effort to seek accommodation alternative to that which I had

offered and continued to provide – three rooms with kitchen, brightly tiled bathroom and no questions asked by Madame Georgelin who bored Martine and referred to her, with a wink of her dull, myopic left eye, as my fiancée.

Now for two happy and apparently unrelated events whose temporal conjunction might, were I of a superstitious and thankful nature, have led me to believe that I was in receipt of a sign of favourable portent; and in my humbler moments I still wonder . . .

First: picture the scene as at about eleven o'clock one morning, with dusty sunbeams betraying the inadequate curtains, I half lay, half sat propped against a plumped pillow trying to reach a decision as to whether or not to eat before early evening. Martine, blue silk dressing gown – a gift – wrapped about her, awaited my word, prodding at her eyes and surely enjoying what she saw in front of her. 'Coffee alone?' 'Yes, I'm sure.' She got up smiling, she had been peeping at my reflection in the mirror. On the rare occasions when I talk to somebody as I'm looking at myself I invariably forget that my head need not pass through a hundred and eighty degrees to address my companion.

On the tray she placed between us there were together with coffee jug, cups, loaf, jam etc., two letters from England, one addressed in the unmistakable hand of my father, the other in neat blue type. Both bore the same postmark, London NW8. Lawrence Ide – for so he signed himself to his son – told me with a wagging finger that I was welcome as always, but that he would be working throughout August. (Exclamation marks, four or five.) And one James Pepler, secretary of the Escoffier Club of London, wished to know whether I would do the fifteen gentlemen who comprise that society the honour of preparing them a dinner on Wednesday, August 18th. The bulk of the page between his simple and vaguely flattering request and his ornate signature constituted an estimate of the cost per head, a list of the facilities which would be at my disposal, a note of the venue of the feast – Leamington House, NW8, and a request that I might telephone

him at my earliest convenience – which turned out to be mid-afternoon the same day. Mr Pepler (had his name ever featured in inch deep headlines?) had had the pleasure of meeting my father, had read and received brightly glowing reports of my prowess and upon learning that I was to be in London during the month of August presumed to inquire . . . He appreciated that it would turn my vacation into something of a busman's holiday, or cook's tour as he so wittily had it but hoped that I might be prevailed upon . . . He mentioned a handsome fee and promised to obtain the services of anybody I might require in my service of the assorted gluttons and gourmets who, drooling and expectant, would assemble on the evening of . . . 'I shall,' I told him, 'be delighted to rustle up a snack for you and your friends [gushing chuckling] and will send as soon as possible my menu and details of my needs.' Mutual thanks, adieus, followed by line dead.

The event which proved, strangely, to be a complement to the above occurred late that night. As was usual on a Tuesday (I remember the day by this fact, not the other way round), Martine had the evening off and returned home alone as had formerly been my habit.

No light was on in the hall of my apartment and I presumed that Martine had retired. Fatigued, I decided to join her immediately, opened the door of the bedroom and clicked on the light. So it was that I savoured the fragrant delight of coming upon her en flagrant délit . . . dans mon lit . . . dans mon lit, Donolly, Donolly – where had I heard that name before? That's right – the Oedipal murderer of Wexford: Fergus, or was he Liam, had discovered his old father going through the same routine with his (the son's of course) old mother, just like he'd been doing for the last thirty years, since, in fact, he'd sired Fergus/Liam/Declan that stormy night in a boggy ditch. The son – whatever his name was – was outraged and asphyxiated his bronchial father. Mother! My mother, long, long gone, sunken way beneath the earth . . . That's put paid to parallels with Liam, (my subconscious is no Hollywood pavement for the heavy feet of Oedipus), and the timid looking gentleman in front of me now wearing one blue

sock with a pillow clutched indignantly to his lap really did not raise very strong feelings in me. I grinned at him as I might have done at the family idiot (which I was, so I'd seen lots of these flashing teeth and crinkling cheeks), and with a quick change of expression turned to Martine as a stern schoolmaster and told her that I was going to beat her till she screamed. Her frustrated mate seemed puzzled and taking advantage of my few steps across the room rolled off the bed, grappled with his sand coloured trousers and, with a wriggling motion, pulled on his tight, red short sleeved shirt. Would he, I asked him with an easy air, care for a whisky? A cognac to help him over his shock? He shook his head with his lips drawn into his mouth, nodded deferentially to me and was gone. I stared at the door for some seconds and then switched my attention to Martine. She looked straight at me and as one we emitted a long, shrieking peal of laughter. With myriad variations I loved her as she lay, as she straddled me and buckled her body.

It's strange – those little things that draw you closer. It's like the wondrous workings of Mother Nature and Father Time who form a flower from a seed . . . I might go on for ever along that narrow path, but I'll desist and note that I found beneath my nose, in front of my eyes, looking me full in the face, there, quite within my reach, an accomplice. By dawn a scheme which had presented itself only behind eerie shrouds now stood before us large as life herself and quite as detailed. Through vanity or cowardice or simply a shameful inability to charge a fellow being with the weaving of my own immaculately conceived web I entrusted as little as possible to Martine; then again maybe I was extending a practical and shielding wing over her lest she become too deeply implicated in a plot which, like any other, could fail.

Without lapses or detours I must set the scene. Leamington House, built in 1842, pillared, stuccoed and framed at the end of a short avenue of elms, named after the noble painter and housing many of his grotesque canvases, lies, as the crow flies, approximately three hundred yards from No. 1 Dansig Square, where my father lived and would die. By road – by wheel or

by heel – the distance is almost one and a half miles, for as well as a variety of ivy covered villas there lies between the two properties – the cardinal points on the chart of my religious art – a picturesquely serene and murky canal bordered by steep bushy banks, one of which, the northern, adjoins the garden of Leamington House, separated from it by a high, mossy wall.

On August 18th I rose at about half past eight and, as I had done every morning since my arrival in London ten days previously, spent an hour briskly exercising in a nearby park where I was taken by the dogs for crazy and by the humans for an athlete. At home my father, still living, was at breakfast with Martine whom, he told me, he found an admirable companion – praise indeed. I joined them in the dining room as they were reading the national daily papers, drank a cup of coffee then set off in my father's shooting brake for my final consultation with Mr Pepler whose livid beetroot of a face so impressed itself on my mind that I can remember nothing else of his appearance. I think that perhaps he was a minor member of that breed whose prizewinners include film producers and professional svengalis and whose pedigree looks fine all the way back to the great art patrons of historic, age old Renaissance Florence. And just as, say, the Chevalier Deschampsneufs put at the disposal of his protégé J-J Hollmann the Château Sadirac only to find that the petulant artist would not grant admission to him during the creation of that monstrous tableau *Le Désespoir d'Ariane*, so Mr Pepler was prepared to tolerate and, I surmised, to encourage my peccadilloes. Imagine my haughty but naturally dissimulated contempt for the man as he made smooth noises about the creative temperament and the licence it demands; imagine too my sheer delight as it became evident that, unbeknown to himself, he was abetting the murder I was going to commit.

I'm no whore, but like many another noted artist (you see how he reinforced my already favourable opinion of myself) I was quite prepared to present my patrons with a second rate product if I was sure they would judge it exquisite, a true marvel, sheer poetry etc. And Mr Pepler was quite clearly

incompetent to distinguish between the real chef d'oeuvre and the flashy impostor, l'oeuvre du chef habile et ruse, so I saw no reason not to take advantage of the blind eyes and dull palates in my audience. He nodded nurse-like when I invented some minor problems of preparation and bid me goodbye till the evening.

With only a few hours to spare I drove slowly along the narrow and grimy streets of one of the poorer quarters of North London, stopped beside a corrugated iron fence and stole a bicycle I found leaning and alone, hurling it nervously into the back of the shooting brake. My theft passed unobserved as far as I could tell and I drove speedily away from the scene of the crime. I was next to be found in a quiet, affluent, residential road along one side of which ran pointed white railings; taking great care to choose a moment when I was certain that I was not under the surveillance of a prying housewife or a bored au pair at her ivy bordered window I removed from the back of the brake the bicycle and a loosely wrapped parcel and threw them over the railings into a rhododendron bush. I stepped back and leant against the car – they were well hidden from view and were hardly likely to catch the eye of a passing pedestrian; the only threat, I thought, to their safety was that presented by furtive pederasts or straying children, or both together, in conjunction. But I was sure that neither party would find anything remarkable in the contents of the brown paper or in the rusting machine and in any case would be unlikely to remove either or to inform anyone of their find, lest the reason for their presence in that leafy spot be revealed.

'There is,' I mused as I walked round to the driver's door, 'a hint of autumn in the air today, the world is preparing for another of its countless changes.' I reversed in the drive of an early Victorian villa and was off. Driving past my father's house I spotted a black Mercedes, with Sir John Ash at the wheel, turning into the drive and jerking to a halt. It was still there forty minutes later when I returned from the sports shop where I'd had urgent business to transact.

John Ash and my father were seated on the terrace overlooking the garden quietly joking about an acquaintance's marital problems when I joined them. We talked for a few minutes about a portrait of John as Polonius, some preliminary sketches for which Father was to make that day; John had just played the role in an as yet unreleased guignolesque film version of old Shakespeare's gory tragedy. 'A pity,' I thought, 'that Father's celebration of his friend's most recent triumph will go unfinished.'

A note about my nerves: they may not have been tattered and ragged but I recall that for most of that day I was of an irritable disposition. However I had succeeded in filling to the brim my mind with details of the evening's dinner so I was able to forget – sometimes for as long as thirty minutes at a stretch – the awful sight that I would find before me when I had perpetrated my nifty stunt. In the early afternoon, just before I left for Leamington House, I made my way into my father's studio to wish him goodbye as I had done on countless other occasions. John Ash, a black robe wrapped about his portly frame, was standing on an elevated platform behind which was suspended a deep maroon plush drape; my father was dithering beside his easel which supported a giant drawing board and its load of thick creamy paper. Evidently expecting no visitors he had discarded his jacket to reveal the ample folds of flesh around his trunk. 'Au revoir,' I muttered from the doorway. Neither man looked my way – had old age brought with it deafness as well as corpulence? I moved further into the room and spoke again. That they resented my intrusion on their intimate act there could be no doubt for they turned and glared simultaneously. I nodded and said that I had to be off. As I was shutting the door behind me my father said distractedly: 'Good luck.' God, how wide was my grin, the skin above my upper lip almost reached my ears. With a large canvas grip in my left hand I walked beside Martine to the car.

Consommé Royale
Sole de la Manche au Vermouth

Poularde Demi Deuil
Timbale d'Epinards
Soufflé Rothschild

Such was the menu I had guilefully conceived and Mr Pepler had had printed beneath the preposterous crest (the great man's profile encircled by a wreath of vines) of the Escoffier Club. My preparation of these sumptuous, noble, though by no means supreme dishes was to be aided by three commis, all young, enthusiastic and pimply, into whom I had already put the fear of God and who, resultantly, tended to cringe in my presence. I had announced to them in an assumed fit of ill temper that I would have to prepare the climactic soufflé in the peace of the inner kitchen. They didn't question my decision.

The saucier, the spottiest of my young assistants, was no virtuoso; in the unbearable heat of the inadequately ventilated sweat shop I cursed him for his glutinous Demi Deuil, opened another bottle of Côtes de Blaye, poured a large measure into the enamelled saucepan and replaced it over a gentle flame. It was still too thick and my heart was pounding. Apparently the assembled diners were in raptures over the sole. This time the result was passable. The poor boy was hopping from one foot to the other beside me. 'It'll do,' I said to him. The spinach mould was lovely, he had real talent, his name was Frank and I'm digressing.

There was an awkward silence after I had loudly and petulantly again admonished the incompetent saucier for letting the superb, plump and succulent chickens cool before administering to them his indifferent creation. Then I turned on my heel and entered the small back kitchen, ushered in Martine and locked the door behind us. The bouilli was already prepared, the diced fruits rested immersed in kirsch and the albumen was ready to be beaten by Martine's shaking hands. I removed my canvas grip from an otherwise empty cupboard, took off my slightly stained white trousers and jacket and lifted from the grip a rubber diver's suit into which, with pain and difficulty, I squeezed my sweating body. With only face and hands exposed to the air and my wrists already

aching from the pressure of the tight cuffs I removed the glacé fruits from the liqueur which I stirred into the bouilli; then I folded into this delicious sauce the stiff and voluminous albumen, poured about a third of this mixture into the four prepared and waiting charlottes, placed on this layer half of the fruits, repeated this whole phase with wondrous dexterity and culminated by pouring the remainder of the mixture to within about eight centimetres from the top of the metal moulds. As Martine knelt placing them in the oven I indicated the icing sugar in its jar with a perforated top: 'After twenty minutes,' I said. She shut the oven door, stood up and I kissed her on the mouth; there were tears in her eyes and as I opened the window which gave on to the lawn at the back of the house she whispered, 'May nothing fell befall you.'

'Turn down that oven to Mark 5 immediately,' I said and jumped the eight or so feet to the ground. I ran across the dark lawn past the enormous metal cast of Lord Leamington's *Hunter and Python* and scarcely noticed the full and bright moon which no fast cloud obscured. I grazed my left hand as I scaled the wall at the end of the garden and experienced a terrible sensation as I fell awkwardly on the other side. I scuttled down the steep bank to the edge of the shiny canal and paused not for a moment before plunging with a long, flat racing dive into its cold and filthy waters. Even before I had reached the other side I wondered if the splash had been heard; gulping for breath I arrived, placed my palms on the towpath which was at the level of my eyes and with a powerful gesture heaved my body from the water, a sizeable volume of which I spat from my mouth. I pulled myself to my feet and ran and crawled and sprawled and willed myself up the southern bank, blindly brushing from before my face the boughs of the all encompassing rhododendron bushes.

Does the picture become clearer? Into focus through the dark leaves came the white railings at the top of the bank, so too did the unwelcoming lighted windows of a house across the road. Without much difficulty I found the bicycle I had lobbed into a bush earlier in the day. No doubt my heart may have missed a beat when I discovered that the brown paper

parcel was not immediately to hand. An eternity elapsed before my groping fingers came upon it. I ripped it open, removed a bulky pullover, a pair of thick corduroy trousers and two old tennis shoes. No hapless, ill placed lover has ever dressed quicker than I did then. My final touch was to remove from a pocket of the jacket a flat cap; pulling it tight about the helmet of my soaking black suit I picked up the bicycle by its crossbar and was on the point of putting it over the railings when an agitated voice yelled, 'Dotty!' Quite so – I was mad to attempt this coup, but my mind was made up and I was almost there. 'Dotty!' From the short drive of the house across the road a middle aged woman with a long neck and a slight stoop appeared on the pavement. 'Dotty, Dotty.' I was detained no longer. A cat, of what size, colour and demeanour I've no idea, emerged from shadow into the pool of light cast by a tall street lamp and was, amidst cooing and sighing, borne in its owner's arms to the hearth. No other cat or human was on the horizon.

I noticed, to my dismay, as soon as I had mounted the machine, that it lacked a rear light, but I didn't allow this discovery to baulk me; pedalling furiously I set off to my father's house. To *my* house. As I had expected no lights were on and John Ash's car was no longer in the drive. I put the bicycle in a flowerbed and crept round the house to emerge in the back garden beside the terrace. My father was a man of habit, and sure enough a light shone in his studio. I darted into the ever open conservatory, picked up and put on a pair of gardening gloves and grasping a traditional and obligatory blunt instrument stole along the metalled path to the french windows at the end of the studio. My father, with his back to me and his hands in his pockets, stood in admiring contemplation before his easel. Fate had decreed that a minor work of the minor Polish composer Volodya – Father's long time favourite – should accompany my act. I bit my lip and clenched my fist. Then the fingers sprung straight and made for the handle of the glass door. As I noiselessly turned it I glanced up and glimpsed on the table beside the easel a dagger. That, I decided with no forethought at all, shall be my weapon,

so I put the spanner I was holding into my inside pocket, opened the door and amidst rolling drums, clashing cymbals, and thundering horns swept across the room, grasped the knife, raised it to my shoulder and plunged it foul and square right between his shoulder blades. Not a sound did he emit, but staggered forward towards the sitter's rostrum and fell clutching the plush drape in front of him. He turned his head as his knees gave way beneath him and I found myself looking into the uncharacteristically curious eyes of Sir John Ash. The famous voice had uttered its last crisp syllable – one formed on his lips but the breath expired before it could give birth to another discharge of sprayed plosives and clattering palatals.

My hand was over my mouth to stifle my shriek. How could I have foreseen such a calamitous contingency? I thought no more, for the movement of *Light of Dawn* which had been playing reached its end and the gramophone switched itself off. A couple of seconds' silence was followed by the sound nearby of a lavatory flushing, a door opening and shutting and steps in the corridor leading to the studio. Stained dagger still in hand I moved behind the drape. My father entered the door and I'm certain that his expression on first sighting his dead double was one of amusement. Then he stood still, half completed a frightened movement of his right arm and leapt across the room to the dead eyes and spent heart of his friend, at whose side he knelt, at whose face he gently pawed with trembling fingers. I wasted no time. I'm not sure to this day if he recognized me as with a sweeping movement I pushed the curtain aside and stuck the dagger in his throat. Surprisingly little blood flowed on to the floor beside him; carefully I wiped the hilt and placed it in Ash's right hand.

Numbed and appalled I ran out of the studio – no need to break a window or steal the jewels – sprinted around the house and jumped on the bicycle. I left it against the railings and this time plunged into the canal with my clothes over the top of the rubber suit. When I clambered, dripping and bedraggled, through the window into the kitchen Martine stared at me in apparent disbelief. 'Was anything amiss afoot?'

she asked, and made to hug me. I pushed her away and tore off jacket, trousers, shoes and my absurd underclothing.

The soufflé was a great success. I took the precaution, before unlocking the door, of tearing off the top buttons of Martine's blouse. This elicited a quite noticeable nudging amongst my nosey assistants and the vulgar waiters. Bloated and drunk Mr Pepler came into the kitchen and dragged me out to receive the congratulations of the society. I nodded and smiled, but my mind was three hundred yards away with the two dead and famous men.

Mr Pepler said that he would indeed be delighted to take a late drink with my father (who'd had no recollection of their meeting) and with us. He followed in his big black car and fainted at the sight in the studio. That night police roamed through the house and in the morning an Indian mechanic knocked on the front door and said that he had parked the car outside and please to inform Sir Ash (sic) that the fault was but a minor one. He handed me the keys and left, whistling a happy song.

My father did indeed leave a sizeable fortune and I further benefited from the estate of wretched, intruding, rash John Ash. The bloody affair attracted a great deal of attention, and both parties – the two victims and the two murderers – would have thrived on the coverage they received.

My secret is well kept; not for one moment did I fall under suspicion. No sleuth ran his distorting glass across my features, had he done so he might have seen what I see every time I gaze at my reflection – the two eyes which witnessed that scene and the two hands which wrought it. Maybe though the mirror (which, more correctly, should be spelt mirrim) is happy to divulge its knowledge only to me, or am I suffering from a ghastly and dangerous delusion? Never one to feign same I cannot pretend that I am contrite: my life has taken a turn for the better and I am haunted neither in my waking hours nor in my pastel, pastoral dreams. The fateful event has taken on in my memory an air of unreality, as if it were a

scene glimpsed long ago and far away in some horrible gothic tableau, in a dark melodrama . . .

However I can never forget it for on the eve of the sordid inquest Martine, with her long fingers in my hair, with her lips close by my neck, murmured quietly: 'Darling, a wife cannot testify against her husband . . .' Till that moment her vicelike hold had gone unmentioned and, I thought, unrealized by her. I am certain that the police regarded the coroner's verdict as a foregone conclusion, but I could not run the risk of the case being reopened by a delving tec in his quest for personal glory.

And so now, as I greet the eager mouths arriving to sup at Le Tour d'Argot (countless stars in every gourmet's book, the talk of seven continents and more, presided over by a man of infinite talent; a genius?), there lurks beside me, proud and smiling, Martine, once a paramour, now, miserably and for always, a wife.

1971

Witchdoktor Hesse

The characteristic pose of the literary biographer is one of genuflection before a secular deity. The knees of Bernhard Zeller's trousers must be pretty thin or, rather, must have been pretty thin – his similarly thin book appeared in Germany nine years ago and has doubtless earned him sufficient gelt to buy a few new pairs. For Hermann Hesse is big business, a *cult figure* revered by the New Generation all over the world. There's a rock group called Steppenwolf, an album called *Abraxas* and Kurt Vonnegut wrote an essay entitled 'Why They Read Hesse'. If one is to believe the interviews recorded in a fairly recent TV programme 'they' read Hesse for the following reasons: 'He was on a really farout trip . . . he was like so wise . . . y'know he knows so much . . . he was so much into the spirit . . . he was the same sign as me . . .'

Hesse, then, is regarded as a prophet, a knowing and learned sage brimming with proverbs. Zeller does not attempt to disabuse the reader of this conception of the author, in fact he fosters it, liberally quoting Hesse's apocalyptic pronouncements on Man's estate and occasionally throwing in one of his own; he shuns any discussion of Hesse's techniques, of the structure of his novels and attempts no appraisal of the author as – pardon the expression – a creative writer. Hesse was nothing if not prolific and from his teens relentlessly recorded his every thought and mood; he wrote during the gestation of *Narcissus and Goldmund* that: 'Almost every book I have written has been a spiritual biography.' He might have said autobiography. Anyway Zeller has taken it upon himself to fill in the few, and mostly rather uninteresting gaps of a physical nature.

Some drunken American author once noted that there

could never be a good biography of a good writer, '. . . If he's any good at all he's too many people . . .' Nevertheless certain scribblers have provided great copy for biographers; tales of brawls and broads, vice and addiction, love and war, wild youth and fiery manhood – the whole gamut in fact. Hesse never strayed far from his desk and, outwardly anyway, led a pretty unremarkable life which makes for, in Zeller's hands at any rate, a pretty boring biography. Hesse was born into a cultured Protestant family of adequate means and his childhood was secure and, apparently, happy – whether or not he witnessed the primal scene we are not told. His adolescence was, like everyone else's, fraught with crises and he performed all the normal tricks associated with teenage – running away from school, submitting to melancholia, falling under the spell of 'enlightened' teachers, seeking solace in religion and alcohol and quitting his first job after three days. In 1895 at the age of 18 he terminated his apprenticeship to a clockmaker and resolved to learn the trade of bookseller. He read voraciously, wrote poems which are dominated, says Zeller, by 'images and sounds of tired sadness, heaviness of the spirit, longing and homesickness', and fell in love (unrequited – he was shy, she was high born). Would marriage, money and a taste of the good life *à l'Allemand* have altered the man, would he have grown up to be a burgher wearing silly hats with feathers in them? Of course not, and equally it wasn't his background, friends and family which formed him. Emphasis on – dreadful, overworked word – the environment is an insult to the individual and to his inherent and indefinable qualities. Would that Zeller hadn't fallen into the trap of relating 'life' to work and vice versa. Hesse really doesn't lend himself to such an approach, his work may have been concerned with himself but every idiot, and literary biographer too, knows that there are several selves, *etc.* (Let's keep popular psychology out of this, eh? – Ed.) One might even suggest that Hesse wrote because there was much in him that could not find a release in any other way. (Let's keep popular psy . . .) The problems of identity and suchlike recur time after time in his work. *Steppenwolf* springs to mind as the supreme example but one

finds in his earlier fiction *Knulp*, published here for the first time, a similar, though less overt preoccupation with role playing and self deception.

Early Spring, the first of the three stories about Knulp, is a vindication of low budget hedonism – the simple pleasures of commune with nature, casual flirtation, life on the road, camaraderie, conversation and self discipline. Yet it soon becomes apparent that all is not as rosy as at first it might appear – Knulp keeps up a roadbook, a record of his employment as journeyman carpenter, wheelwright, cooper, *etc.* But it is a fiction, he never works, preferring to live off the charity of his friends. He possesses a chameleon quality which helps him get by although he is patently deceitful, all the knowledge of trades and crafts which he displays seems designed only to ingratiate him with their practitioners. Knulp's independence is illusory, in order to live he has to eat from the hands of those whom he despises, and eventually he causes himself to be despised by his lack of gratitude and his insistence on asserting his self-sufficiency. In the second story, a first person narrative largely composed of reflective conversation between Knulp and the story teller with whom he is hiking, he gets up in the middle of the night and disappears. At the end of the book he no longer finds himself able to accept anyone's hospitality and dies in the snow after God has told him: 'You were a wanderer in my name and wherever you went you brought the settled folk a little homesickness for freedom. In my name you did silly things and people scoffed at you; I myself was scoffed at in you and loved in you.' Such heavy-handed whimsy seems horribly vulgar and confirms one's worst suspicions about the characteristically Teutonic confusion of folksiness with moral worth. It is an essentially puritan and ascetic mélange. Is it the dreadful climate that makes us northern races such a miserable bunch? Discuss.

Günter Grass wrote an extraordinarily boring play called *The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising*. Should a theatrical director (closely modelled on Bert Brecht) of professed socialist views who is rehearsing *Coriolanus* send his actors out to join the strikers in the street? Who cares? Why, G Grass and, it seems,

lots of other earnest Germans deeply concerned with *the role of the artist in society*. Hesse had already been resident in Switzerland for two years when World War I broke out. With unbelievable and unselfconscious self-importance he wrote: 'I, too, was once obliged to cast away my whole contemplative philosophy and offer myself to the cares of the day, and if necessary bleed myself to death in doing so.' Such hypersensitivity and self-involvement seem rather unhealthy. The political and moral stances of artists are of interest only to schmucks. (One dictionary of slang defines a schmuck as someone with pens sticking out of his breast pocket.) The greatest writers of fiction do not express 'philosophic' ideas or comment on current events. They create objects, they are craftsmen and entertainers. Hesse most certainly does not rank among them. Powerful stuff. Anyway, back to the storyline. Hesse, in association with Romain Rolland and others, directed the Berne Book Centre for German prisoners of war. He also underwent psychoanalysis: 'The treatment considerably enlarged Hesse's outlook and persuaded him to follow new paths in a fresh approach to his own development as man and poet.' Hey ho. And off we go with our hero as he pens some real big ones – *Demian, Siddhartha* and *Steppenwolf. Demian* is published in this country endorsed on its paper cover by Timothy Leary – 'dispassionate, fearless, honest . . .' Really it is a story of hero worship tarted up with meaningful and religious trimmings. It is not dissimilar to *Young Torless* or to the infinitely superior, superbly evocative *Le Grand Meaulnes*.

'The Nazis abhorred and suppressed his books.' So says the biographical note to be found in Penguin editions of Hesse's books. It's wrong – 20 titles were published during the Third Reich, and he was widely read. Penguin's motives in bending the facts are glaringly obvious – show him as a defender of humanity, a prophet unrecognized in his own country, a man whose words were feared by the loathsome tyrant lest they in some way incite the people . . . The truth of the matter is that though he never in any way flirted with fascism and published articles, albeit mild ones, attacking the regime, it is not

altogether fanciful to suggest that at no time did the Nazi authorities regard him as being subversive – anything but, they must have recognized that the kind of spiritual pornography he peddled was not so different from their own. (No doubt a pack of irate, incensed, incense-bearing and peace-loving Hesse fans will lynch me for that.) Of course Hesse was by no means as dangerous as his Jew-baiting contemporaries, but like them he was a utopian and an élitist (I mean that in its everyday, derogatory sense.) The Reich was an attempt at a kitschy utopia, its quest for space cost countless millions of lives. It is doubtful that any lives were lost in the creation of Castalia, the imaginary, intensely hierarchical, spiritual province which forms the 'setting' of *The Glass Bead Game*. This learned, heavyweight, portentous novel is generally considered Hesse's masterpiece. As a piece of mystic whimsy it is probably without peer in the west. The game of the title isn't actually defined – it is some form of contemplative and, one guesses, therapeutic exercise not unlike those which the author set for himself while tending bonfires in the garden of his home in Montagnola. The protagonist of the novel, whose biography it purports to be, is Josef Knecht, Magister Ludi, the supreme exponent of the game, a sort of cosmic Bobby Fischer or Ely Culbertson. (Hesse incidentally and typically despised crosswords.) Ultimately Knecht rejects the order of Castalians and quits his ivory tower – all this, apparently, stands for an artist's shunning aestheticism and embracing a 'committed' standpoint . . .

After *The Glass Bead Game* Hesse wrote no more major fictions, devoting the last 20 years of his life to his work as an anthologist and to his massive correspondence. He was the spiritual mentor of thousands who, deluded souls, wrote to him seeking advice and enlightenment. A gymnast in Tokyo wrote him that: '. . . the more I read your books, the more I find myself in them. And now I am convinced that the person who understands me best in the world is in Switzerland, and that I am never out of his sight.' The least one can hope for is that Hesse, like another bigtime Teutonic witchdoctor, will soon be discredited.

Hermann Hesse. An Illustrated Biography by Bernhard Zeller
Knulp. Three Tales from the Life of Knulp by Hermann Hesse

1972

Stuck In The Preterite

I remember them as if it were yesterday: Olivia and Kenneth. That yesterday was thirty years ago. And they had elected to pretend it was thirty years thitherto. They were self embalmed in their and this century's twenties. Olivia had been 'on the stage'. Now she had her insides missing; where had they gone, I wondered. The rest of her body was all there: she'd lift her clothes to show it off. My mother thought her risible, couldn't remember if her hairdo was Louise Brooks's or Clara Bow's. I knew 'Tiptoe Through The Tulips' came from the Hollywood Revue of 1928. Olivia told me I had 'promise'; Kenneth glared, his forte. There was much he couldn't forgive life for: the disappearance of running-boards, common people, GOPWOs (acronym for grossly over-promoted warrant officers). He wore a moustache, a blazer, a tattersall check shirt, a cravat, tan suede chukka boots. He sold cars from a showroom that smelled of leather. This sad, preposterous couple drove about in an open Triumph TR2 – coloured BRG of course. That's Olivia's scarf, that's Kenneth's cheesecutter cap, that's my first memory of people who were extravagantly – what? Outside their time, stuck in the past, witting victims of the great chronal trap? They willed youth to revisit them, invited it back, made themselves accommodating hosts. And of course the bastard didn't show for the party, never does, always snubs. The disappointment shows: the slight adds to the already dismal prospect of dying cells, greying hairs, rotting teeth, fucked over organs. Olivia and Kenneth behaved as though they had had face-jobs, kidded themselves they had – but even those who've had them, or had hair weaves, kid no one but themselves. But that knowledge is not going to stop

me, my children, and theirs, from doing what this race has always done, i.e. fighting mortality, trying to vanquish the decay that signals it. The summoning of our youth is merely an ineffective weapon deployed in the war. There are of course no effective weapons in the war. The fiction of an afterlife, heaven or hell, is but a grand, complex and equally duff weapon constructed to the same vain end, an ontological Blue Streak: it's part of the delusory system we are forced to construct in order to dodge the unhappy truth that after this there's nothing.

A more frequently revived uchronia when I was little was The War. It was like belonging to a martial club. Its badges were worn with defiance rather than defensiveness. Some badges were inerasable – you could always shave a handlebar moustache, you could always quit talking about sprogs and going for a burton but you could do nothing about it if you'd nearly been for a burton and had metal legs; if you had no eyes, a branded number on your wrist that signalled a scar on your soul, if you were a veg who shook. Some were stuck, some chose to be stuck: they clung to wartime ranks, even promoted themselves; for a brief period, about '47–'52, the bogus major and the ersatz wingco were staple types. The same sort of retrospective self elevation seems to be commonplace among those whose (wholefood) salad days were the late 60s. You know the type, the former footsoldier in the army of the longhaired who claims now to have balled Grace Slick, tripped with Jimi, to have been there the night Brian died. You do know the type for he's everywhere. Whereas his father, called up in his early twenties at the outbreak of war, adopted a DIY gravity that pretended to middle age and strenuously dissembled his youth the son has attempted to prolong his youth (which was very likely a miserable one). The only means of prolongation that's effective is the one no one wants to espouse, the one that is desperately shunned – death. It is surely a finer fate to be dead in your troubled prime at the bottom of a swimming pool than it is to be a forty five years old parody of your former self. But then the problems of those who are required to be professionally young

are peculiar to them, at least they are in scale: there is no genus more pathetically undignified than the middle aged pop star. They've paid for cheating death by being forever condemned to behave as children. Their juniors are older than they are. These things go, like everything else, in cycles. It is clear that teenage in its institutionalized, formulaic, commercially lucrative mode is a thing of the past, a fashion that's had its day, a phenomenon that afflicted only those born between about 1945 and 1960. The gap between childhood and adulthood has contracted to the point it was at when teenage was invented in the late 50s; in those days the thinkers at the van of youth culture (as it wasn't yet called) had ambitions to become 'all round entertainers', i.e. enter mainsteam showbiz. The mould had not yet been broken. Now it has been glued together again, and the average twenty year old wants to be a fifty year old. It is not now economically advisable to treat one's third decade as a long holiday, it is now economically advisable to treat one's third decade as one's sixth, to get stuck in the future. Necessity (pecuniary, psychological, cultural) is the root of all self determination: we may choose to try to live in our own or another past but we choose because we must. Not everyone is forced to make that choice. Some of us stumble through serial presents as we might through interminable mixed woodland; and what rubs off on us – the leafmould that sticks to our shoes, the lichens that colour our sleeves, the fungal spores that make our nostrils itch – keeps changing. Most of us don't want to cover ourselves with poisonous red berries and tell ourselves and anyone who'll look that we're among the yews when patently those pachydermal trunks there belong to beeches.

What does it signify? – that so and so's very 30s, or Tracey's into the 50s, or Glynn's totally 1890s, really decadent. What it signifies is the striving of members of the herd for some form of originality; the fact that the rest of the herd is striving for the same form of originality is a terrible shame, but what always seems to happen. Of course it *does* go beyond postures, clothes, icons; it goes beyond even the more profound end of that vulgar sub-journalistic industry which stereotypes each

decade according to its (necessarily atypical) heroes, popular idols, movements, artefacts. What it does is give a standard, remembered or illusory, by which to measure the present, to censure it, to amend it. Those who have set up camp as its apologists see the 60s for instance in so generalized a way that it is hard to believe that they lived through those years. Yet it is the generalization that performs as the standard; the generalization is not the product of the specific items of different lives but what was common to those different lives. The past is thus homogenized, sprayed the same green as the other side of the valley, used as a club to beat the present. Look across the valley of the Calder at Hebden Bridge, across that of the Wye at Hay and you'll get the picture. Both these places belong to the day before yesterday. So too does The Convoy, wherever that is now: *I Ching*, acid rock, Paki Black, no clothes sense, inane optimism, paranoia – its denizens went in for the things which are supposed to characterize the late 60s, which most certainly did not characterize mine. Here was the full dress pantomime of the generalized past being played out (in '84) on the edge of Salisbury Plain. Even though these chromosomal losers and touching no-hopers (who didn't for a moment deserve what they got from the thugs of the Wiltshire police) were living this life for real the impression I got was of a theme park or open air museum devoted to the 'alternative lifestyle' of a decade and a half thitherto. Now if people who are prepared to put up with total discomfort, police surveillance, ankle deep dogshit and – above all – boredom are feebly unconvincing in their embrace of their golden age what are we to make of arcadians who go about it less in earnest?

1988

Cool Breeze For The Peace Convoy

'This,' said Adam, a twitchy kid who'd hitched a ride from Stockbridge – the last leg of his recurrent journey from his parents' home in Surrey to his proclaimedly 'real' home, a shared bender, 'this – it's the States. You know, the Deep South. The Midwest. *You know.*' You're wrong son. This is England: a breezeblock piggery stumbling down a scrubby hill; a petrol station with pumps so corroded they're like anthropoform targets struck by countless rounds; a second old petrol station, this one only recently boarded-up; small-holdings that are all lean-to sheds and immobile homes; a scrapyard; another scrapyard; the shells of cars – these are ubiquitous, everywhere here aspires to the state of scrapyard; bungalows – all sorts from your eponymous Bengali prototype to your York stone and baby yellow conifers job; chrome yellow fields; the odd hedge; lots of barbed wire; the wedge of two A roads, one of which is doing much better than the other – more traffic, more business and so on. It looks like the rural black economy has scored an own goal.

There are more things to see at Lopcombe (aka Lobscombe) Corner. Here is The Mount Motel. It's a spec-builder's dream, a dream dreamt circa '58; shingles and brick and lav-green render and *such* picture windows. Through them you'll see pitted tarmac, a half built bungalow (surely a bungalow?), a burnt out garage, gravel, a brick blockhouse, The Convoy. It seems apt that The Convoy should chuck up on such a chunk of our Green and Pleasant. They are both resolutely unofficial, unregulated. Lopcombe Corner belongs, initially, to the post Great War world of subsidy housing and, notionally, to the Distributist ideal of three acres and a cow. The Convoy is

equally impervious to check and belongs, by its own boast, to an older tradition of home-made utopianism – carefree, nomadic, in touch with the earth and the sky. It is of course improbable that Travellers ever quite knew the bliss ascribed to them by Borrow and Augustus John and de la Mare; even the patrician super-hippies of the late sixties with their gaily painted wagons and whacking remittances must have suffered a bit, but nothing like so much as The Convoy which is an object of recurrent interest to a number of provincial police forces, to a number of gentlemen from Mr Murdoch's baser papers, to Salisbury's new MP, an eager porky man who sounds off loudly in the Conservative interest. These parties have, doubtless, little in common save a tendency to use a bulldozer where a trowel would do. Their effect has been to succour the already healthy paranoia that is collectively felt throughout The Convoy and have it grow into a lusty adult sense of persecution. After a while you cannot but believe that these people *need* the injustices that are done them, that the ever-present likelihood of confrontation is their raison d'être, that they get strength and a sense of their hermetic identity from their antagonists' zeal. There is discomfiture on account of their being welcome in their field at The Mount: 'We're grateful to the guy, right? But we don't want to be here. It's not like The Drove, and we want to be on the road in summer. Here it's like being Indians on a reservation. Buy us another firewater then?'

Life at The Drove was harder. Water had to be got from a tap in the churchyard at Coombe Bissett, a mile and a half away. The site was sunless, wooded, muddy, so muddy that some vehicles had sunk so that their wheels were no longer visible. Everywhere you looked there were people carrying things – lumps of internal combustion engine, babies, jerry cans, boughs, sheets of metal, sacks – crossing each other's paths, hurrying with termites' resolution. The patterns were incomprehensible. I suppose we are unused to witnessing people working to provide themselves with fundaments. 'God, it's like being back in India,' said the friend who was with me the

first time I went there, 'Goa in the rain.' There were coaches, mostly flashily streamlined ones of twenty-five years ago which had once presented chrome grins to the world and now presented nasty caries; their sides were the victims of DIY psychedelic swirls. There were former ambulances and school buses and telephone linesmen's lorries. An ancient caravan can be bought for about £20, given a tosh of paint, refurbished with panels from the copious supply of disintegrating coaches and resold for £80: much of The Convoy's economy is thus insular, rabbits are traded for diesel, diesel for wood. The wood goes into stoves whose pipes protrude through the roofs of vehicles and benders alike. Benders are rudimentary huts with sound prehistorical precedents; green wood poles cut from saplings are stuck into the ground and woven to form a shell. Over such shells our ancestors stretched turves, hanks of bark, peat. The Convoy stretches tarpaulins and thick agricultural polythene instead. The look may not accord with the frequently and defiantly made claim that 'we're ecology conscious' but the resultant structures are far more agreeable dwellings than you'd believe possible. Take this one, lived in by a former circus worker in his forties: it is furnished in the all-purpose oriental of the Oz generation. Most of the ceiling is covered in carpets and so is the floor. There are ivory elephants, a Tibetan mandala, brass snake candle holders, statues of Shiva, a copy of the *I Ching*, a TV run off a generator outside, a tape machine with stereo speakers (ditto) playing Eric Clapton, The Doors, other unrecognized stuff of that era. The place smells of patchouli. The owner, Alex, is abundantly tattooed as, indeed, are many of the men and quite a few of the women. Also, there is a sartorial sameness: denims, dungarees, naturally very distressed leather, heavy boots or bare feet, thick woollies. There is much wild, matted, dull hair (denied access to public baths). It's as if Dexy's Midnight Runners has grown to be 400 strong. There is however a true salad of accents (every region you can think of, Received Pronunciation, American, Australian) indicating a diversity of background.

Alison comes from Southampton where her father 'has his

own company' and where she is supposed to be doing A levels in English and Sociology – 'I'm not interested.' Her parents have given up trying to stop her spending weekends with The Convoy. It is very probably to her like that a Salisbury publican was referring when he said: 'Young girls, it must break their mum and dad's hearts . . . I won't have them here, no one will.' More or less right, about their being refused admission to pubs. Alison says: 'This is the only life.' She has not spent more than three consecutive nights at The Convoy. She's 'got used' to being searched by the police. Roy is thirty-two and ran away from his mother's house in Cornwall when he was fourteen. He had been expelled from three schools 'for just being me'. 1967 found him as a fifteen year old at Piccadilly Circus selling speed, acid, anything. Busted. Travelled with The Living Theatre in France. (I encountered this lot at a friend's place outside Bordeaux at about the time Roy was with them. Their abandon was terrifying.) Travelled with the embryonic Convoy after the 'free festivals' of the early 70s. Worked as a courier. Ran a fruit farm in the Vaucluse – 'I liked it. Sitting out in the evening. But it was just feeding into the system, *their* system. Look, they don't govern; they've just got the illusion that they govern.' Rejoined The Convoy when he returned from France. *'How did you know where they were?'* 'You just hear.' Like many of his fellows he is a keen amateur of the history and mythology and martyrology of The Convoy. The topography is invariable – Haverfordwest, Inglestone, Berkhamsted, Norwich, Stonehenge, always Stonehenge. There are the same tales of 'incredibly heavy police', the same bathetically sentimental reminiscences of good trips, good festivals, good friends who were sent down. It adds up to a world view coloured in brightest monochrome.

Danny used to be a roof tiler. He gave that up to live in a tepee on Powys. 'In a tepee you need a woman. You need a fire going all day to keep it aired. You've got to have a woman to do the woman things, like.' Danny's woman now is Tess, whose parents are teachers. She goes to see them once a month at home in Newbury. 'Near Greenham,' she explains. 'We're a peace convoy,' says Danny, ' – it's the same, 'cept

we're mobile, yeh?' Well, no. Danny's van was missing an axle and an engine and despite a loan from his mother he hadn't the money to fix it. Every fortnight he and Tess went into Salisbury from The Drove to collect their social security money, £20 p.w., 'I'm going to come off it when I can' – this is, again, an invariable assertion – 'our system works on love not money. When money comes on the site it does the rounds.' Which means of course that it sticks to some more than to others; here is the skeleton of a hierarchy coming into view.

Don has been on the road for twelve years. 'My family was army, always moving around – that's how I got itchy feet. I didn't believe in money when I started but you've got to learn to trade. I don't just mean dope' – there's a triple beam balance in his bus – 'I mean scrap, jewellery, anything. We've got thousands of pounds' worth of jewellery; it's difficult to sell because if *we've* got that sort of stuff the police say it's nicked and try to confiscate it. I got thirty-two pulls in the first six months of having this bus. True, I didn't have number plates and insurance. One day I was stopped seven times. My wife was pregnant and got strip-searched three times. They can lock us up but it doesn't do any good, we always come back to this. This is the greatest sociological experiment happening in this country because it's not as if people have thought *we're going to experiment.* They make it like an open prison though, there's always police cars watching. They spent millions of pounds on surveillance of us, moving us on, taking us in.' *On what charges?* 'Non payment of fines.' *Fines for what?* 'Non payment of fines.' *What was the original offence?* 'Non payment . . .' This merciless regression would only have ended up at traffic violations or possession of cannabis or petty theft or 'sus'. Don was anyway interrupted in his stonewalling by a car horn tooting outside. Two men, 40 stone the pair, were squeezed, like Jane Russell in an A-cup, into a tarnished Mini. 'You got some Datsuns I heard, Don.' 'Nissans, mate, I've got Nissans.' As if they don't believe him they get out in their cheap suits and squelch about on their tiny fat men's feet looking all around them for signs of Datsuns. When they come

back to the bus one asks: 'Well, in that case you got any of that stuff then?' And Don weighs them out ¼oz deals on his scales. In the course of about an hour and a half he took about £100 in exchange for little lumps of rabbit dropping, known to The Convoy as 'blim' or 'mix'. That's trade. 'I tell you one thing – there's no smack up here. If you got anyone dealing that up here we'd throw their stuff in the mud and see them off the site. You'd get smack in Salisbury but not up here. You couldn't lead this life if you were on junk, it's too rigorous. We take in people who are trying to get off junk. We offer sanctuary to people who'd be in asylums otherwise, we're like a church.'

At The Drove there were also a herbalist, a tattooist, a man who told me the planets are moving into a new eon, a cot death – the mother was taken into custody, a teacher who set up a school in a bus, cases of orf (a zoonotic viral infection contracted from sheep and goats) and of scabies ('you always get that when there are people down from squats in cities') both of which were supposedly remedied by the herbalist – 'doctors won't see us, no fixed abode; same with dentists.' On top of this there were dogs, skulking mongrels most of them, who knew nothing about the place's trench lavatories and dumped their shit promiscuously and generously. The proximity of this filth to grubby happy children seems to worry no one, least of all the children who probably know better than to touch it. It was actually the dogs who probably cost The Convoy the site at The Drove. This part of the Shaftesbury Drove, which runs twenty or so miles west from Salisbury along the top of the downs (into whose chalk are cut the cap badges of commonwealth regiments), is owned by the Wilton House estate. It abuts on to Salisbury race course and South Wilts golf course. The Earl of Pembroke was disinclined to move The Convoy from this tract of perfectly useless land. Mr Robert Key, MP, son of a former Bishop of Sherborne, visited the site last autumn, told the local paper (to which he contributes a comically fishwifely column) that he had been threatened with knives and machetes and suggested that the Army be brought in to clear the wart. (Three army officers I

polled on this one reacted thus: 'he's a twit', 'oh really', 'some of my chaps go up there to buy their goodies'.) Salisbury clergy was calm. The Bishop received a deputation from The Convoy. Salisbury's many pubs barred them though Mr Roger Baker of the Hope and Anchor said: 'I don't mind them in *here*, we've got vinyl seats in here. I won't have them in *there* because the fabric absorbs the smell.' South Wilts golf club members thought the view from the eleventh was spoiled. Anyone at The Convoy will tell you that men in cardigans and futuristically plaid trousers drove golf balls across the race course at the coaches and benders; anyone at the golf club will tell you that when they had potted at certain holes and went to retrieve their balls they found them covered in human excrement. Salisbury Racecourse announced that the first meeting of the year would have to be cancelled if The Convoy wasn't moved – dogs are not allowed on racecourses lest one does an Emily Davison on behalf of The Convoy. So the Wilton Estate was leant on and after three High Court hearings an eviction order was granted by Mr Justice Hirst. The Convoy moved to Fargo Plantation, a dozen miles north, part of the National Trust's Stonehenge Estate. Enter Sheriff's officers, Mr Les Vaughan of the security firm of Vaughan and Bellringer, a police helicopter, an armed police back-up squad. Enter also – though at quite what point is moot – Mr Kenneth Avery of the Mount Motel, Lopscombe Corner.

Everyone but Mr Avery will tell you that Mr Avery invited The Convoy on to the field beside his motor hotel – 'a captive custom for his range of pressurized and bottled beers' is how local thought goes. Mr Avery is reticent about this. He is a company director whose brick blockhouse beside the motel is used for converting the heads of animals into butchers' mince. A blue lorry arrives bearing bloody heads in drums and departs with bales of fine mince. Mr Avery has a partner called Phil Butler who 'does most of the cutting up and has good connections in the world of mince' – this according to a neighbour. I don't know if Mr Avery has connections in the police and I don't know why he should want to do the police

a favour – he certainly has done them a favour, as well as himself. I don't know because, like his wife Jan said, 'he's not going to talk to you.' Still, the fact remains that by helping The Convoy on to a parcel of easily surveillable land – one entrance and the same exit – he *has* done a favour to the police (who, incidentally, turned over the houses of some of Mr Avery's 'associates' soon after they had raided him earlier this year). If it is the case that The Convoy is a collective dupe, a sort of 'trade', it is not apparent to its members.

A couple of nights after The Convoy had moved on to his land a garage beside the mince plant went up in flames. A burnt out speedboat and the remnants of a Lada stand beside the wrecked building. Just who applied the torch is so far undiscovered – local vigilantes, act of God, Jewish Lightning . . . who knows? The Convoy anyway is used to this sort of incident which will pass into its lore. Meanwhile everyone looks forward to the solstice at Stonehenge, mechanicals smelt scrap on wood furnaces, chillums are passed round incanting circles, human pyramids teeter against the sun, men fly through the air. For a moment it is seductive to subscribe to the notion of the nomadic ideal, to accept the claim that these are the heirs to the troubadours. But then heavy metal starts to blast and dogs bark and you realize you weren't made for this, wrong conjunction of the planets.

1984

MoD Squad: Martial High Jinks On Salisbury Plain

The nomenclatural laxity now habitual in civilian life has a martial shadow. Thus Brigadier the Hon. William Rous is initially referred to as Brigadier Willy Rous; thereafter, once you've got the idea of this man, he is referred to as Brigadier Willy, *tout court*. He will be introduced to you as Brigadier Willy Rous and addressed by his immediate subordinates as Brigadier, never as Sir. Sir is for officers of below field rank, NCOs, soldiers. One can make what are patently reckoned as bad gaffes. Walking up the path to the disagreeable 1960s building that houses his office I referred to Colonel Michael Shellard as 'Shellard'; the major beside me put me right – '*Colonel* Mike Shellard says . . .' He put me right with such instinctive alacrity that it was evident I had somehow compromised him by so demeaning a senior officer. We were without the earshot of every other soul on this planet, but that's not what mattered. What mattered was that I was insouciantly, momentarily, disacknowledging the notion of hierarchy. Now, no matter how sedulously this notion may be dissembled, it still grips the army (as, no doubt, it must if such a complicated organism is to work at all); and it renders all the efforts at dissemblance a trifle risible. All these Christian names, all these *truncated* Christian names – every Anthony is Tony, every Christopher, Chris – seem like the work of an appellative cosmetician. And the curious boast that 'nowadays we don't give orders, we *ask* for things to be done' is rather hollow, a communal self-delusion: an order is an order even if it is prefixed by 'would you' or 'd'you think you could', even, indeed, if it's expressed in the form of the coercive first person plural – 'we ought to muck out the lats now Private Ackroyd.'

Still, all this lends an air of civility to the job. The martinet has had his day, he's not needed, there are no bolshie conscripts now, no unwilling future salesmen and would-be playwrights and can't-wait-to-be haulage millionaires to be given jankers, to be given coils of barbed wire (each one a furlong) to straighten out. No, everyone in The Professionals is in because he wants, isn't he?

'We're The Professionals.'

I can't believe my ears. But then the major with a just-stitched eyelid beside me in the ill suspended Land Rover spinejolting through a landscape of craters and day-glo pyramids from a giant's board game and crows and wintry beeches *sings* this sentence to a tune by Arthur Sullivan: 'Wee-hheeee-ee igher theee prrrfessss'n'yells, the prohohohohofesseonaltz.' This turns out to be his signal for a story which shows someone has acted in an incompetent if not unprofessional way, and what prompts the story is the other officer in the vehicle filling me in, like this:

'That chap I was talking to just now was at Sandhurst with me and at Warminster and Bielefeld but I haven't seen him since '74, Londonderry . . . since when I've found that my brother's godmother is his aunt, his mother's sister-in-law – she's a great old character, Beth, her husband was a Tankie with my father. It's a bit like that, whoops' – vertebrae sandwich – 'everyone knows everyone and you hear about everyone – I knew that he was probably going to be here today. It is like a family, just like a family.' This is offered as a complimentary analogy. Members of families – don't they feud, vie to outspite each other, bugger each other about, incubate grudges then send them out marauding? They do. 'We, uhm, tend to regulate against that. Posting is difficult. They tend not to make too many cock-ups. You do get people who rub up against each other. I suppose they try to keep them apart. Things can get bad. But you've got to be able to get on. It's a big part of your job.' This is when the singing starts.

What happened was that a few years ago a humourless

officer took to the humourless's very own form of humour, the practical joke, and sent another *notably* humourless officer who was on a freebie (attending a conference) in Western Australia a wire requesting him to report immediately to the MoD in Whitehall, which he did having moved heaven and earth to get himself across the earth in double quick time. 'I'm going to wreck his career,' he said to anyone who'd listen when he found out who had wired him. Now, maybe, he's in a position to do just that, he has been appointed to the command of the regiment where his antagonist lurks. 'Some spacer has been at work' – spacer means someone with space between his ears, it is commonly used – 'he should have *known*, it's his job to get the intelligence. It's an embuggerance having that sort of thing going on. It affects everyone, it's felt down the line.' For 'intelligence' in that sentence safely read bush-telegraph, this is not the sort of information that is included (other than broadly euphemistically) in annual reports.

The Land Rover lurches over a knoll and beneath us, in a re-entrant, is disposed a scene which recalls, in everything save its lack of colour, a tournament or the battle lines of another age. This is laid on for 'the fathers', a disparate bunch of men whose sons, second-lieutenants, have just completed an immediately post Sandhurst artillery course – in the army there's a course for everything. Here are 105mm light guns, 4 ton trucks, 1 ton Land Rovers, 432-type armoured personnel carriers. All dun and khaki and field camouflaged all serried with ordered abstraction across a barren slope. The fathers include a former soldier, an insurance man, a plastics engineer; one of them has an oddly bohemian appearance – lank long hair and old time art teacher's duds. They are linked today by, presumably, a quiet pride and, with the exception of the one military man, a half colonel, by bemusement at the teaching aids and procedures and manifold gadgetry of simulated war. I'll bet none of them is thinking of his son: *his card is already being marked, he has already inhibited his career's progress by this or that indiscretion.* I'll bet none of them is thinking: *he's opted for a life which is akin to being at school*

forever. It really is a bit that way: the enforced gregariousness, the defined ladder to the star ranks, the food, the generally real subscription to team spirit, those annual reports, the chappishness, the communal hairbrush in a mess lavatory, the absence of choice, the buffers against the quotidian hassles of life outside. The fathers, if they are capable of fancy in the stabbing wind, are more likely prospecting valour, gallantry, duty.

They have reason to dream that way; many of the officers and men now scurrying between the radio antennae, peeing against truck wheels, brewing char, nattering shop, wearing headphones like fallen tiaras – many of these men have laid their lives on the line, have seen their muckers killed or maimed in Northern Ireland and the Falklands. Some of them give you the feeling that if they ventured into Hell they'd get back in one piece to their world of subsidized housing and aided school fees. Some of them give you the feeling that they'd *enjoy* doing that; they want to court physical danger, to live on the edge. War is a drug. In its lieu they put themselves through body-crocking processes. The fitness of these guys is impressive. War is also a game, by which I quite evidently do not intend to suggest it is frivolous, nor do I intend to deprecate those who fight the bloody, inevitable things. What I mean is that it has its own pulse and movement like an atrocious beast, it has (or requires) programmes, strategies, peculiar procedures and manners; it is a law to itself, quite outside the normal run. Now, the peacetime army has forever to pretend that the beast is around the corner, it has to make itself ready by inventing a cardboard beast. Maybe this preparedness can only be achieved by cosseting its people, insulating them, subjecting them to rules and notions which are foreign to 'common sense'. (The thing, anyway, about common sense is that it *is* common.) All professions, vocations have their collectively received ideas. The idea that the Warsaw Pact nations are a bogey which will get you if you tread on the lines between the paving slabs is the sine qua non of the army's existence and purpose. Intelligent men subscribe blindly to this fear. They may be dead right to do so.

It may be more than a vocational necessity; it may be that the preoccupation with Russian tactics (inflexible, direct, prodigal of men and machinery) and the covert respect for Russian might will, one miserable day, be quite vindicated. And the humbug of the Eastern Bloc's hiding belligerence behind such a word as *Pact* will be exposed.

In his head no one wants war, in his heart – well, that's a different matter. The affair with arms that so many men enter into is of the heart – it is the capabilities rather than the consequences that are so beguiling. Acronymic weapons systems are doted on, just as crossbows were, just as muzzle loaders were. Casual conversations are metaphors for the 'arms race': 'The FH70 is the most sophisticated gun, magnificent . . . but they're developing an armour' – braggart angler mime – 'that will be impervious to it, so it'll be redundant, but then they'll soon develop one that'll go through *that* armour.' They might also be metaphors for drugs versus quick learning bacteria. Between the reports of shells a visiting officer tells me: 'The great thing about being at a school' – he means the artillery school at Larkhill – 'is that *you do fire a lot*. I only get 19 rounds a year. It's nowhere near enough . . . It was great fun in Germany – I got some Chieftains [tanks] refurbished and took them out every Friday afternoon.' Someone starts to bang on about PISH – Penetration Improved something or other. I am invited to handle a shell; honestly, it did nothing for me. I am instructed in loading procedures; ditto. Then Colonel Mike, whose show this is, springs from his staff car: 'It's a grubby soldierly sort of day,' he says to me. Even that strikes me as a glorification of this climatic horror. 'You should be here when it's cold.' The military father, a rank junior but ten years older – Shellard is clearly a high flyer – says: 'I like your training area Colonel.' 'Good, good.' Other fathers and sons and officers crowd round as though to pay oblations to a passing prince. Shellard informs the fathers of what they've seen so far, here and earlier in a classroom: 'Computer driven imagery . . . like one of those arcade games . . . brackets . . . Single Shot Kill Probability . . . in wartime we'd really *infest* the area . . . £200 a time . . .' The major with the stitched

eyelid approaches his colonel and acknowledges him with a music hall salute, the sort of salute that might be practised in a third world army with Ruritanian uniforms. It is a gesture of abundant geniality and more significant of the new, relaxed, open-necked army than all the eager protestations to that end.

'Fun soldiering' – this is Brigadier the Hon. Willy Rous, last year the youngest brigadier in HM's army – 'that's what I'm into.' He actually says 'into', he actually says 'fun soldiering'. Such infelicities – the province of disc jockeys and ragtraders – are markedly anomalous coming from this man who's a canny charmer with fleet mentation and a high tory hairdo. Mercifully he can't keep it up, he keeps lapsing into more or less standard English, suffixing much of what he says with 'you didn't hear that Jonathan', or 'that's not attributable.' So I must pretend not have heard his recipe for 'fun soldiering' – 'I want my chaps to get their leg over as often as they bloody well can when they're here [Tidworth] – they deserve it after what they have to put up with.' This seems an unexceptionable hope, one that is likely to be realized whether or not he wants it, one that he need not be coy about broadcasting. After all, such lubricious recreation will keep the troops off the streets, keep them out of the untidy fights that used to sprawl through Salisbury and Andover on Saturday nights. The fact that off-duty troops no longer go about in uniform must help – I mean, it must help them both to avoid fights and to pull love-chums.

Another way that fights are avoided is by putting certain pubs off-limits. Such proscriptions are not taken seriously: 'We always go to them on stag nights,' said a YO. I went to one on a Thursday night, a labyrinthine place near an overpass that cuts crassly across Salisbury's mediaeval grid. There were four soldiers there – their haircuts were the giveaway, and twice that number of aspirantly minatory bikers, backwoods louts with bumfluff stubble and greaser jeans. Whatever menace they evinced with their scowls and their irrhythmic banging of glasses to Black Sabbath on the juke was mitigated when I strolled out through the back door and saw their bikes

prissily parked at the kerb – all Honda 50s and teeny Suzukis and toys with L plates. They didn't look worth fighting. It would all be too easy, over in a flash. The best rumbles – biggest, bloodiest, broken bones and broken bottles – are inter-regimental. Willy Rous did not tell me this so it is unattributable to him, OK? These fights invariably involve Scottish soldiers, who have fearsome reputations based, no doubt, in lore rather than feats; but, nonetheless, when someone says 'there's a Scotch regiment there' you get what they mean. Willy Rous would not offer such information because he is a) too generous of spirit to lump anyone according to type, b) too discreet (usually), c) too proud of his rank, his army, his men. This pride in his men borders on the sentimental, sometimes trespasses into the devotional. He will never describe anyone as less than sound, mostly they're splendid. One imagines that this seamless promiscuity is not correspondent with what he really thinks, but he indubitably has the enviable talent of giving everyone the benefit of the doubt. And this is reciprocated: 'Well, Brigadier Willy is a bit affected, a bit theatrical' – he is, he's a good mimic and has a wit that is, now and again, curiously camp (by army standards) – 'but you have to like him, he is a very nice man.' Again, yes, and he inspires trust even when he is telling you: 'I'm being quite frank, quite open.' He became most anxious when he thought that I believed the officer responsible for a cock-up during an exercise would be reprimanded: 'That's not the way we do things.' But when he saw me poring over a map during that same exercise, and making notes, he deputed someone to make infinitely discreet but thorough enquiries about what I had been writing. Look, Sir, I was baffled by the thing, I was writing about the shine on a toecap (an abandoned simile of tarns, dusk, ice.)

What I'm getting at is that he just can't have got where he is today and will be tomorrow – 'he's going right to the top' – by mere niceness. Whoever did? There are other qualities . . . It is not easy though to resolve which *are* the qualities that get you on. There is no stereotypical overachiever. Some conduct

themselves like victims of EST – 'Think-positive-on-this-one-Jonathan.' (Some hope.) Some have the flush and vigour of the American higher management caste. Some possess a steely reasonableness. They have blue eyes (double recessive genes) for scrutiny, but then all army officers have blue eyes, ocular uniform. Many officers (though not, I note, the flyers) wear buggers' grips; sideburns are out, so they shave their cheeks till they sprout healthy mini-bushes which they then topiarize into dinky wedges. Clothes are another matter. 'If you see two officers dressed identically you can be sure that one is an imposter.' You *never* see two officers dressed identically. Every regiment has its sartorial quirks, every officer his. This may be the legacy of Montgomery. It is nothing to do with striving for a spurious individuality, rather it is an expression of real individuality – it says a lot for the quality and strength of character of today's officers that they resist the homogenizing tendency of the mill they are put through. They are as preoccupied with kit as with technology, gadgetry and hardware.

A 'tankie' of my acquaintance, in the black pullover of his corps, said, as we entered a mess full of gunners, 'I'm going to stand out like a sore thumb.' He didn't, in fact – there were brown pullovers, blue ones, maroon ones, khaki ones. There were brown veldskoen, black Oxfords, boots with rubber soles, old issue boots with leather soles and studs, ('At Sandhurst I was made to shine the studs'). There are incessant mutual enquiries about kit: 'What's that shirt . . . Norwegian marine issue . . . that's a nifty collar pin, Pablo . . . these boots have a bellows tongue . . . they're smashing trews but they're poly-cotton, make you pong a bit . . . where did you get that, I want it . . . is that Barbour a Barbour . . . I'm entitled to a blue beret but I wouldn't wear it here . . . I *do* like that parka.' This is all rather attractive: style requires limits, variety within a defined compass is infinitely more appealing than abandon (which is why realism is more imaginatively satisfying than fantasy. Constraints are not chains). It is also, again, all faintly reminiscent of school. The RA Mess at Larkhill which the 'tankie' entered with trepidation is reminiscent of a meld of St

James's clubs and provincial hotels. It is neo Georgian of the late 30s in what has become known as the Hore Belisha style, almost certainly designed by the Ministry of Works' architect W.A. Ross whose work was a damn sight better than that which has succeeded it. There is a dining hall which is vast and vaguely akin to a late C18 chapel, there are horsey prints in myriad styles, Snaffles prints of pig-sticking, a large and discriminately stocked cellar, there are sitting rooms stocked with all daily papers save *The Guardian* – which no one would read anyway other than to mock at.

Mockery may be stronging it a little. Maybe lofty incredulity is nearer the mark. I tried out Borges's aphoristic verdict on the Falklands 'conflict' – 'Two bald men fighting over a comb' – on a couple of officers. It didn't offend them, it quite amused them, but 'You have to question things at the right time – afterwards. Otherwise it's like telling someone to duck and they don't and their head's blown off.' And: 'Of course you're at the mercy of the politicians and of course you may think you're absolute twits. But you have a job to do. You do, literally, serve the country. There's no room for moralizing. That's for you lot. Look, trying to keep the peace in Northern Ireland is like Fucking For Virginity. You'll find a thousand different shades of opinion from people who've been there. But you do it – you go and get stuck in. You know bloody well you aren't in the business of creating utopias . . . Then, who is?' Quite. This cast of mind is habitually mirrored in attitudes towards enemies. The attitude seems – astonishingly – to be that the IRA and the INLA are just doing a job too, and that anyone in uniform must regard himself as a legitimate target; the political convenience of regarding terrorists as criminals is not much adhered to. It wouldn't be like 'Fucking For Virginity' if the army was given its head: 'The whole thing could be cleared up in a matter of months – temporarily anyway – if we could act, if we were *allowed* to act on all the bubble we have.' Bubble = intelligence. 'As it is, it's like getting into the ring with one arm tied behind your back. You can't fight properly under those conditions. Take car bombs –

you can't aim a rocket at them, you'll bring down a whole street that people are living in. They have to be defused. They *are* brave, the boys in bomb disposal. You know those suits they wear – they afford no protection, they just prevent the bits of the body being blown over a quarter of a mile if the thing does go up.' The Falklands and Northern Ireland loom hugely in the army's current mythology, they are the tangible justifications of recent years (the Russians enjoy their particular bogey status because they are, if not unknown, unfamiliar combatants). These troublesome places are props, objects of a rueful nostalgia even among men who've never been to them. One hears tales of balmy disco evenings at the Maze, of night patrols under fire, of yomps and tabs, of days in ditches on subsistence rations; I even got treated to an encomium of Bobby Sands – 'he died for what he believed in.' Life on the Plain, even with its fabricated rigours, is much cushier if potentially very boring.

Peace brings in its wake a gamut of uncertainties and trials. The garrisons – Tidworth, Larkhill, Bulford – are isolated places. They foster hermeticism. There is an analogy with tied towns, company towns like Philips's Eindhoven or Lever's Port Sunlight, where everyone lives over the shop. The shortness of postings tends to preclude making civilian friendships. The world outside can appear as remote as Albania and – in its chaos and absence of defined order – an object of fear and incomprehension. Men in their 30s who have failed to gain admission to the Staff College or who have not done well there, who know anyway that they will never make star rank, are constantly thinking about getting out before it is too late to embark on a civilian career. They are inhibited a) by the knowledge that they would have to abandon their perquisites and take a cut in real income of up to 50% and b) by the fact that they are in some measure 'institutionalized', with careers mapped from an early age. To learn a new set of rules for a new rat race is a daunting prospect. 'I've been meaning to leave for ten years now' – this is an infantry major in his early 40s and his cups – 'and the longer I put it off the harder it gets. I'm buggered if I want to be a publican or a rep – all I

know is soldiering. Which is man management – but I'm never going to get the same status in industry, am I?'

Young officers, recently commissioned, many of them graduates, about 30% of them from public schools (as opposed to 70% only a decade ago) are improbably prey to such worries, yet. There is a marked careerism abroad. One senses among these young men an impatience with old, gentlemanly ways, one senses a harshness and an admiration for the sort of Toryism that precludes noblesse oblige, the 'officially' sanctioned selfishness of Patrick Jenkin and Norman Fowler. One senses too that they discomfit their seniors. Willy Rous is unusual among his coevals in his phlegm: 'Graduates can make as good officers as anyone else . . . I was at university myself. They . . .' At this juncture a lieutenant spilled a drink on Rous's trousers and went very red. 'Don't worry dear boy,' he said, evidently glad of the interruption, then continued on a novel tack, listing the extra-curricular achievements of some of the graduate officers getting mildly bevvied around us. One keeps up the regimental scrapbook, another is mess president and so on. They sounded like the things that dim, pushy new Tories include in their CVs – just look in *Who's Who*. The more usual reactions of his generation to the new breed vary between 'cocksure' and 'too clever by half'. The young artillery officer who was sick over his colonel one Dinner Night and wrote a letter of apology concluding, 'I look forward to the next Dinner Night' is, I fear, atypical, a throwback to the tradition of roaring boys who used to dice across the Plain in Healey 3000s and crash parties as well as cars and let off Verey lights in nightclubs. Their forays to the far side of loutishness may have been tiresome, but they were at least colourful. This lot seem so *careful*. It is impossible to believe that those roaring boys (now, of course, majors) would ever have described their social lives thus: 'Well, we know some Norland nannies, and then there are the nurses at Odstock . . .' The old polarization of hearties (who joined the army) and aesthetes (BBC, publishing, that sort of thing) has long gone. The boys who'll inherit the Plain belong to a social grouping that despises the amateur (which I don't mean in its secondary sense of

dabbler), that believes career is all (whether it be in the army or the BBC), that sees nothing wrong in jargon.

The boast that professions persistently make about themselves that they 'reflect society' is usually pretty empty. You know – us architects reflect society, the 'media' ditto, and lawyers, and, very probably, hairdressers. In the case of the army – well, the army of after-tomorrow, when this new lot are in command – it may be true for once. The army is diminishing in size, it looks like getting ever more ingrown with its specializations and hyperambitious officers – it will reflect the society of these islands which becomes more factional, more aggressively factional by the year. The army will be a paradigm – sealed-up, self-allusive, obfuscatory in its system and manners. With luck it won't happen. With luck the ageing roaring boys will, by example or exhortation, knock some of the self regarding earnestness out of their juniors. The Glosters colonel who remarked, 'Meeting us must be like meeting Martians' was, one hopes, as imprescient as he was wrong about himself and his fellows.

1984

Carving A Career In Style: Robert Elms

There is, of course, nothing more conventional than youthful non-conformism. Rebecca West noted this of Zelda Fitzgerald more than half a century ago. Youth culture has become institutionalized, and, however much the protagonists of one wave may abhor their immediate predecessors, they're all pretty much the same if you're on the outside: sartorial waywardness; impatience with the 'straight' world of parents, businessmen, authority; untutored hedonism on a budget. These movements, though they may promiscuously pretend to the idea of community, are rigorously hierarchical. There is always an élite whose mores, clothes, catch-phrases are the models for an army of acolytes. There is always a laureate, an instant 'historian'-cum-proselytizer, the one with the words and a talent for promoting himself as the embodiment of an ideal.

The spivs had James Curtis (whose novels, like *The Gilt Kid*, Eric Partridge praised as fine repositories of slang). The Teds had no one because they couldn't read and write; the proto-Mods had Colin MacInnes, who was old enough to be their father but wasn't interested in generation or generation gaps; the beats over there had Kerouac and the beats over here had Royston Ellis; the Chelsea wide boys had Robin Cook who could really write (and whose novel, *The Crust On Its Uppers*, Eric Partridge praised as the finest repository of slang since *The Gilt Kid*); hippiedom had Richard Neville; punk had Julie Burchill, who is still the right side of 25. The New Romantics, or whatever they're called this month, have Robert Elms.

'You're Robert Elms. Aren't you? You're Robert Elms.' This is a girl in a windowpane check sack and dinky leather cap.

This is in a pub at Cambridge Circus where Robert Elms is drinking Grolsch lager (he likes the bottles) with brandy chasers. He has already told me he gets recognized, 'even in New York'. Dinky Leather Cap and her chums want to start a magazine. Robert Elms has a chair fetched for him; if he isn't a king in the hermetic, self-referential world of 'style magazines' he is certainly a godfather, and a pretty prolix one. He doesn't *try* to faze these kids (schmuttered-up foot soldiers in the army of acolytes), but he does so nonetheless. Ozalids, point sizes, separations, the technical griff – stuff they don't know about, stuff they've not even thought about, don't want to think about. What they want to know about is clothes, records, his *really* famous mates in Spandau Ballet (he invented the name). He obliges: they learn about the 'mystique' of disc jockeys, about how anyone can do anything, about the wallies who run television, about the spuriousness of the notion of originality. A girl with a shadow of a lisp asks him solemnly about 'subjectivity' and he tells her, 'I'm an entertainer.' Then another girl, smothered in *diamanté* and gold threads, with the air of a soon-to-be-aged art tart, gets on to what she wants to know about, which happens to be what Robert Elms is happy to tell her about: Robert Elms, His Life and Times.

When you are 24, three years ago seems a long time back. The nuances of style within your group seem important. The flat-top haircuts and zoot suits of 1981 seem manifestations of a distant age. A spear-point collar that was just dandy then seems hopelessly *vieux jeu* now. Robert Elms subscribes to all this, and he knows it. He has a sense of his own history and he has pulled off the trick of making his own history appear to be the history of his generation *up to now*: the socio-pop history of youth cults is that of their leaders, not the acolytes.

Robert Elms was born on the Burnt Oak council estate in Hendon in 1959, the youngest of three brothers, one of whom is a milkman. The other is a company director but Robert Elms is not quite certain what the company is. His father, who died when he was six, was a steel erector, a good union man. The son is too (National Union of Journalists), and he doesn't

confuse socialism with puritanism. His mother used to serve in Woolworth's, now she works for a mail order firm. He is a North London chauvinist, tells a story of the ignominy a friend's family suffered when the son married south of the river, can't understand why his company director brother migrated south, still lives north himself. 'I live in sin with a black girl in Tottenham.'

He was apprised of the existence of teen tribes early on: 'My big brother was a Mod, the other was a skinhead, first time round that was, '69.' In the last year of the eleven-plus he won a place at Orange Hill Grammar School which was situated in the middle of his estate. 'Politically and morally it was wrong. Not grammar schools – but the fact that they only expected to send one kid from my primary school. That coloured my thinking. It's inequality of *expectation* that's so bad, much worse than inequality of opportunity.' The few other working-class boys at this school set in a ghetto ('lots of them never leave the place in their whole life') did what was expected of them: they became cab drivers, market traders and commissars of the black economy. 'Not real villains, mind. I hate those bastards. I hate the way the middle class patronizes them.'

Synchronicity being what it is, the iron-pumped figure of John McVicar brawns out from the silent telly in Robert Elms's sitting room (exposed plaster, exploding horse-hair). 'What a poser. What a way to be a celebrity. Pimping off having been banged up.' Sound up. Mr McVicar tells us how to dispose of bullion, should we have any. Robert Elms mutters: 'They might have a code but you just want to ask Jimmy Boyle how far it stretches. They'll cut *anyone*.' Robert Elms believes in self help, not in helping yourself.

He did his tertiary education at the London School of Economics and did gruelling night school at the 'portable' clubs that began to spring up in the late Seventies. 'I was always a soul boy. When Otis Redding was killed my brother wore a black arm band. But when I was at school there were no clubs in London. We went right out to the suburbs. To Canvey, where I dressed like Bryan Ferry in his GI outfit. Tie

tucked in my shirt. You could really pull if you looked like that.' He despised most of his schoolmates. 'They wanted to look dirty. Greatcoats with progressive albums stuck under their arms. Long hair.' This year's model Robert Elms has long hair. 'Yeh, but that's different. They had long hair for the *wrong reasons*.' So there. 'I got sick of my flat-top so I said to Ollie [coif architect to the New Romantics] that I wanted to get rid of it. But I wanted to stay Germanic. So he said General Custer.'

Before we go out Robert Elms sprays his mane with reeking lacquer and inspects himself in a full-length mirror on the landing of the converted fire station where his flat is. 'Every home should have one,' he says of the mirror. His vanity is winsome, because overt. He and his peers are narcissists *without shame*, dandies *without artifice*. We're talking here not about High Dandyism, the stuff of exquisites who are *sui generis* and laws unto themselves, but merely about an overriding preoccupation to be ahead of the fashion game. *This* is what Robert Elms is strong on. This is why he is a sort of arbiter of taste (you might think he's a victim of taste, but he's too fly). This is why the tabloid 'music' press mocks him and dumps on him. The factionalism of this world is laughable, pathetic. Someone or other described rock journalism as 'people who can't write interviewing people who can't talk for people who can't read'.

The Face is the allegedly 'important' magazine in which Elms launched himself. It calls itself 'The World's Best Dressed Magazine' and every month analyses in fascinated detail that small corner of youth culture where art college, pop and design meet. I'm not sure if the 60,000 people who buy it can read and I'm not sure if all of its contributors can write. But both groups have a talent for wearing Rayban sunshades and for understanding that frivolity is a serious business. Robert Elms *can* write, he *can* make phrases, he *can* be very funny: these are rare attributes in his milieu though whether they are actually recognized within that milieu is moot. Nick Logan, who edits *The Face*, says things like: 'More than anything he's got good taste . . . He's there in the firing line . . . His taste is

good . . . It's been proved he's got good taste.' And Peter York, who is inevitably part of the cast in an article like this, the Sam Kydd of 'style', says: 'I like him. He has the same views on many things as me . . . I think he's on the right track, given that he's on my wavelength.'

Well, maybe, but Robert Elms is not among the disciples of Tom Wolfe (he's hardly read him, and isn't keen). He believes that he belongs to a predominantly oral, pub tradition of anecdote and one liners: 'I'm a poor representative of the guy who stands in a pub and talks. They're much better than me. They're *blinding* story tellers. It's just that I've had an education.' His self-alignment with this tradition is, as he must know, his escape route from his present small world into another world, one of lurid local colour and lowish life: this is the stuff that the novel he's working on is thick with. It's called *In Search of The Crack* – 'crack' is London Irish for a good time, preferably one spent with mates in a Kilburn pub on Friday night. Espousal of this pub tradition also gives him access to the mainstream. Just now he is, by his own admission, taken up as 'the token youth', but he has the nous and the talent to get the far side of that. Quite what will happen to the army of acolytes he leaves behind is anybody's guess – anybody's that is apart from Robert Elms's, for his prescription for and analysis of his generation is as goofily, wildly optimistic as those of the hippies he so despises.

He is way off the mark about the technologically fecund and sybaritic life his dole-prone generation is going to lead: there just aren't enough videos and frilly shirts to go round, it's as simple as that. While he preaches 'creative' laziness, he actually works hard. While he properly scorns both the fly-blown nihilism of the punks and the squalid communal guilt of the denimed protest people, he offers little more than a materially acquisitive version of the grossly indulgent do-your-own-thing 'philosophy'. Awkward questions about the creation of wealth are ducked or fudged with unconvincing pronouncements about 'Britain leading the world into post-industrialism where no one works'.

Things are not going to be that easy for the army of acolytes.

Pace Robert Elms – who, it need hardly be further emphasized, is atypical of his coevals – they don't all have the talent to compose apothegmatic half-truths – ('Prejudice is a short cut to wisdom. The right society is founded on the right prejudices', and 'I believe in original goodness – well tainted. Sin is like sauces. It's what makes people interesting') – and build a career on them.

1984

The Triumph of Lifemanship: Richard Branson

A tonsure is precisely not the clump of hair left to an otherwise bald man. Julien Clerc is not – in so far as the epithet means anything at all – 'France's Frank Sinatra'. Latterly is not a synonym of lately, nor is militate of mitigate, nor disinterest of uninterest. Bankers no longer wear frock coats. 'Confirmed bachelor', as a euphemism for homosexual, was not a middle-class usage of the 1960s. And so on, and on. But despite its countless mistakes of peripheral detail, its malapropisms and syntactical infelicities, and despite being wrought in the nerveless prose of bestsellerdom Mr Brown's portrait of the ubiquitous, grinning, unshy entrepreneur and adventurer is acute enough and it stays a long way this side of idolatry – which is perhaps surprising in the light of its publisher's claim that it is 'both critical and authorised'. That's a novel construction, a putative oxymoron. It turns out, however, to be true or true-ish. It *is* critical, in an authorized sort of way. It certainly takes Richard Branson at his own estimate but it also allows the many enemies he has accumulated during his prodigious twenty year career to have their say. Mr Brown's technique is reportorial: he is self-effacing, unspeculative and unwont to build conclusions. That is something he leaves to his readers – and it's hard to imagine that should R. Branson be among them (he could hardly read at the age of eight and is no bookworm now) he will be especially flattered by the diligently researched deprecations he is made to suffer. Mr Brown compensates for his stylistic bereavements with stealth, cunning and a flair for the non-attributable kneecapping.

During the period that I edited *Event* ('the triumph of incompetent management over editorial flair' – Tina Brown,

though her namesake Mick would not concur) I had a weekly meeting with Richard Branson, an ideal proprietor in that he expressed no interest in the magazine's contents, an infuriating and recklessly miserly one in that he'd spend an hour disputing the film critic's £30 expenses claim whilst making a telephone offer of £300,000 to The Stranglers to sign for Virgin Records. There is a worrying correspondence between the first Branson that Mr Brown gives us, the Surrey schoolboy, and this one that I knew (there isn't that much to know). The 'music-industry' millionaire is instantly recognizable in the boy: physically fearless, intellectually uninquiring, headstrong, gauche, familially loyal, endlessly competitive. The child was, manifestly, father to the grown-up child. Branson's strength derives from this very childishness and from his failure to have been touched by the milieux of Stowe, whose reputation for bullying (which he suffered) and coercive homosexuality (which he didn't) was at its worst when he was there, and of the by then institutionalized London hippiedom whose base tastes he catered to. His culture, if you can call it that, is self made and portable. He is impervious to the world, a solipsistic action-man. He possesses a child's amorality, a childish inability to distinguish between *I want* and *Is it possible to obtain*, a childish blindness to the hurdles that may litter the path between him and the object of his latest desire, a childish taste for japes and practical jokes. He is an archetypical case of *homo ludens*, a Stephen Potter lifeman preposterously inflated. He does not so much break rules as tend not to know they exist. His antinomian posture, like much else about him, is unselfconscious. Mr Brown implies all this though whether it will actually strike those unacquainted with his subject is moot. He is further rather reticent about spelling out the exclusive and hermetic nature of Virgin's hierarchy which is like that of a laughably primitive tribe. It is based on family ties, old friendships, seigneurial exploitation and the notion that loyalty is all. In return for untempered loyalty Branson gives persons of markedly limited ability positions of responsibility that they could never attain elsewhere; they tend to know they couldn't attain them elsewhere and are thus loyal

captives. The main way, though, to get on in the family is to become, literally, part of it. Marrying Branson's sister was no hindrance to the career of one Robert Devereux, a smart publicist at Macmillan's who was thus assumed to know something about books – though by his own admission he has never finished one. Otherwise it helps if you've known The Leader for twenty or more years, since the 'early days', and can snare in the tawdry mythology of His Struggle.

Mr Brown has done astonishingly well for an outsider. If there is a constant underemphasis in his book it is almost surely because he wants to keep things credible. Journalistic naturalism is not a mode that can adequately cope with the phenomenal and retain belief. So what we get is a fairly human Branson. A different mode, less bound to the facts of the case, might more accurately represent the sheer strangeness of the adult child. A work in such a mode will begin with the frightening disparity between his full face and his profile.

Richard Branson: The Inside Story by Mick Brown

1988

Reprobate: Robin Cook

There's that Robin Cook – the one with the adult literacy problem as grave as Jeffrey Archer's, the one with the dwarf talent and the giant bankroll, the one who gave you *Coma* and a headache. That one actually did something worse than *Coma* – he failed to change his name. That one's some sort of usurper, a name-thief, a bad shadow: the moniker that sits on the front of his 'books' belongs to someone else, it belongs to this Robin Cook, the kosher article, the one who now calls himself – here, but not in France where he lives, where he's big, where no one's even heard of Robin Coma – Derek Raymond. 'Derek was the name of a great friend – dead. And Raymond was the surname of another. Dead too.' It's a bit of a miracle that Cook's not stiff with them – when you think of the way he ran, of the sheer pace, of the way he looked on life as an eternal Glasgow, as a blockhouse you take out with headbutts and spleen, when you think of the snap, the fizz, the angst. This Cook was always on the margin, riding the edge like there was no tomorrow.

He left Eton aged 16 in 1947 and fifteen years later, '62, published a novel of staggering brio called *The Crust On Its Uppers* – a scarily near-autobiographical account of his twenties and Chelsea's late fifties, written in an argot so dense that there's a glossary at the front and Eric Partridge recognized it as the greatest source of slang in a quarter of a century. It is of course a roman à clef, and among those who may or may not be represented in it but who were certainly of Cook's milieu are: Mark Sykes, Henrietta Moraes, Peter Scaramanga, Charles Da Silva, 'Dandy' Kim Caborn Waterfield, Ann Barr, Joan Shihwarg, Jeffrey Bernard, Ian Dunlop, Mary Rous etc. Cook

wrote it at his parents' house, a gothic hallucination in Kent, where he had gone to the mattresses till some heat cooled off. '1960 was a very busy year for Cookie,' he alludes to this man in the third person just like, in fact, he was dead, ' – I was living a novel a day. I'd got bored and gone to Italy for a year. When I came back the whole place was wide open.' Just the ticket for a smart morrie like Cook who by this time had acquired a supremely dodgy CV: he had smuggled paintings between London and Amsterdam, sold hot tape recorders in Spain, 'imported' British cars from Gibraltar to Madrid, had worked in a capacity I'm not going to tell you about for the above named Da Silva. 'He was bent as arseholes. *Bent*'s too feeble. Before you could say conman backwards in five languages I was in the middle of it.' Of course it didn't just happen; Cook went looking for trouble – if it wasn't the law, it was women, if it wasn't women it was amyl nitrite or chemmy or bevvy or fast motors (3.4 Jags a speciality). 'Robin's a cunt,' says Jeff Bernard. This is high praise when you know the sort of thing Bernard usually says about his friends. 'But he's never a shit.' So *now* you know. Bernard lived in a house in Trevor Place that Cook had rented from 'an incredibly bent financier called Robert Jacobs, also known as . . . Oh . . . Jeffrey lived in the boiler room. We had 24 hour parties most days – Robert Helpmann lived next door, nice old queen, used to *beg* us to turn the music down.' Cook, a cruel mimic, does ironed-out Antipodean green-room to a tee. 'Robin,' says another friend from those days, 'behaved badly before anyone else did.'

The pioneer tearaway spent the sixties writing a further five novels peopled by posh dross – conmen and pornographers and fascists and toyboys and tarts – and set in Chelsea and drinking clubs and the faded flats of sad old queers and sexually voracious duchesses. He pinned an entire sub-stratum of society to a board with joyful misanthropy and a real glee in human failing. He lived part of the time in Italy, near Grosseto, farming vines, and returned to London after the break-up of one of his four marriages. He drove a minicab for a year in the early seventies and then moved off to France, to

a large, primitive house near Millau in the Aveyron. ('What they call the Midi moins quart.') For eight years he wrote nothing, worked as a roofer, a labourer in other people's vineyards, a cab driver and so on. When he did start writing again the stuff was, apparently, very different; the laureate of bad sorts with good breeding had turned into a detective writer. And that Robin Cook had shown up to destroy forests and clog airports.

So here comes Derek Raymond. But really he's not so different. His prose still has the sting of the gutter, even if the gutter is now in Lewisham or Acton and the people who stumble into it are the filth and publicans and nasty lager-yobs with chains and trainers. This is not, mark, the world of *Minder* – it's a thousand times more wicked. Cook's good at evil. He's still got that uncharitable humour which also marked Joe Orton – 'I've got a *towel* that belonged to Orton. Never met him, never saw his plays, but I did see that biography. Ah . . . John Lahr. I thought – you've hit double top there, my fellow.' He still has no time for anyone rash enough to disagree with him – 'You know what's so weird about God – it's all these cunts who believe in him.' And he still takes a keen interest in the misfortunes of others – 'Did you see? Two cowboys burgled Charlie Kray's minder. And they got a suspended stretch. But they wanted to be banged up – it'd have been safer for them. *Burgling a Kray* – they must be tired of life.'

These two hapless cowboys might have escaped from a Derek Raymond novel, poor sods. The most awful things happen to losers in these books. But that's not the real source of their appeal: their nameless first-person protagonist is a professionally unsuccessful detective sergeant who sometimes seems like Justice itself; further, the narrative seems to hit top gear straightaway and never lets up; also, the characters are people, not genre-hack cyphers. The silly irony of Cook/Raymond's success in France is that the absolute authenticity of the London speech and the narrator's seamy prose disappear in translation. They're also lost on film – just as no one ever filmed *The Crust On Its Uppers*, despite its being under

option for nine years, so has the 'British film industry' missed out here. *He Died With His Eyes Open*, his first detective novel, has been filmed by Jacques Deray with Michel Serrault and Charlotte Rampling, and the loci have been shifted across the Channel. Another film is probably on the way and Cook is now the subject of an hour long documentary which will be shown on French TV this summer. A morrie is not without honour, save in his own manor.

1985

Heath Bin In?

One of the ream of stitch-ups that Frederic Raphael received for his novel *Heaven and Earth* suggested that its representation of society was on a par with a strip cartoon. This is a calumny on cartoonists and far more than Raphael deserved; both Raphael and the reviewer who thus unwittingly praised him would do well to look again – they might learn something. The reviewer might learn not to draw such lazy comparisons, Raphael might learn concision and to use his eyes; there are also the lessons about the primacy of subject matter, about self-effacement, about art that dissembles itself, about style being the servant of thought and not a sort of fancy dress. It is of course no more likely that Raphael will heed me than that he will find the missing 'k' from his given name, but should he suddenly be struck with humility then the man to give the master-class must be Michael Heath who is, in Richard Ingrams's unexceptionable words, 'the most prolific and consistently funny cartoonist in Britain'. Heath is more than this – at his best he's harrowing, moral, grim and liable to scrape nerves, really hurt. For instance: a doctor addressing a nurse outside a Family Planning Clinic, 'Good morning nurse, and isn't it the kind of morning that makes you glad your mother didn't have the right to choose.' This sort of stuff has an emotional charge and a tendency to metaphysical discomfiture which no other cartoonist presently at work achieves, or even essays. Heath's breezy savagery isn't in the usual tradition of such cartooning: he doesn't excel on public themes; he shuns allegory; what Toniben calls the 'great ishoos of the day' excite him only insofar as they touch on *private* lives; his milieux are domestic; his situations are usually 'realistic' – I mean he

rarely steps outside the borders of the possible. Within them he makes a satire fuelled by misanthropy (which he won't admit to) and puritanism (which he will) and a form of filial fear.

Michael Heath's father was a cartoonist who drew for comics like *Radio Fun* and was paid less and less the more he worked – such are the hazards of being in the employ of D.C. Thomson, a publishing outfit people are legendarily keen to escape from. The son's work is colossal both in output and scope. He publishes about 25 or 30 drawings each week and executes about twice that number. Boy cartoonists will note that he uses a Ball Pentel or dip-pen nib sellotaped on to an ink-encrusted water-colour brush; that he draws on non-designer paper, any scrap that's to hand; and that he works – necessarily – at an extraordinary rate. He seems to suffer an endless cataract of ideas for gags, like a speedy stand-up comic, the flow only mitigated by the time it takes to draw the figures. He says he wants to draw the way Thelonius Monk plays, i.e. in a state of improvisatory rapture, never knowing what will happen next, forever (presumably) in touch with his subconscious; he reckons that Monk's contemporary Bill Evans was 'too controlled'. Evans was elegant, Monk wasn't, Heath isn't. One is reminded of Anthony Burgess's assertion that good novels, representations of the truth, can never be wholly elegant because the truth isn't. Heath's style is an analogue of dense, sometimes clogged prose; there's furious energy in his drawings – those for 'Great Bores' are tirelessly detailed – there is a plethora of subject matter and correspondent measures of cross-hatching, herring-bone effects, striping, stippling, blobbing, tacheing, spotting, chequering, shading. It is a threefold assault: on eyes, nerves and preconceptions – Heath's very good at kneecapping lazy ideas. He realizes, resignedly rather than with bitterness, that 'Other people are successful because they say what you've said.' He guesses he's successful because 'I know a truth when it's staring at me.' He is imaginative rather than fanciful, i.e. his stuff is the product of chronic observation of the British.

His axis for most of his life has been London–Brighton. He

spent his childhood in Hampstead (sketches *collarless* suit with brown, yoke-yellow sleeves he had made when he was twelve in 1947, the year his parents migrated to the seaside). He went for a year to Brighton Art School, was a trainee animator with Rank (the only thing he has in common with Bob Monkhouse). He sold his first drawing, of Thelonius Monk, to *Melody Maker* in 1955. He worked for a fellow clothie, John Taylor, on *Man About Town* and *Town* and endured a 'rough period' in the Sixties when the fashion swung towards Scarfe and Steadman and their apes. Now of course his stuff is everywhere. Heath is no traveller; it's not that he thinks abroad is particularly bloody, just that he finds more excitement in his habitual manor than elsewhere. He's right of course; the only worthwhile travel is that of the mind. Till last year he'd never been out of Europe and only rarely out of England. Then Heinemann sent him off to the United States of America.

So now you can add anti-American to the familiar inventory of charges against Heath – misogynistic, homophobic, callous, uncaring, nasty. These are of course the charges habitually levelled at any worthwhile artist in any medium. Heath spent five weeks in the States and describes it as 'like a nervous breakdown standing up'. *Welcome to America* is a despatch from hell, it's a defamation of an entire nation from meth-heads in the Bowery, through middle-American shoppers and moustachioed fags and computer salesmen and country singers and short-order cooks to decent folk. It shows – should anyone require further proof – that Heath is much more than a mere humorist (a sad species that never hurt anyone), that he's a man with a sure eye for disease. The book is as comforting as pictures of infected organs. It's more brutal than anything he's done before, his method is bludgeoning rather than sharp. And I guess it's not quite as precise as his home-based stuff – familiarity breeds detail. But for all that it's a marvellously emetic addition to the gallery of Americas through old worldly eyes.

Welcome to America by Michael Heath

1985

Bringing Liver to the Vegans: Dusty Hughes

Some of us like to join in, others don't. Matter of temperament. I would no more link arms with the unwashed to sing a protest jingle than I would give money to one of those importunate Tory ladies. No club, no church, no political affiliations, blah blah. Most of my friends, too, come from the ranks of the unattached; occasionally though one of them has strayed into the collective pudding, into what Tom Wolfe calls (in another context) 'the compounds'. In the pudding there is strength in numbers, there are shared causes and credos, there is a sense of exclusivity and moral or political or doctrinal probity, there is the conviction that the criticisms of outsiders are 'irrelevant' because they are based on different premises – this, anyway, is what those of us out in the cold tend to think as we stand around muttering about freemasonry and the Old Sparts' Act and about the way that there is always a gross gap between precept and practice.

One friend who did get gregarious (grex, gregis – flock, you remember) and who did stray, nay jump into the pudding, was Dusty Hughes. Happy to say that he is out of it now and has been for some years. His play about his days in the pudding, *Commitments* won him an award (presented at something called the Martini Terrace at New Zealand House) as, I think, best new playwright of 1980. He has now adapted (i.e. truncated) it for telly. I do not much like the theatre as a form of representation and I especially dislike fringe theatres as places in which to pass an evening – uncomfortable seats, sycophantic audiences etc; however I sat through *Commitments* with great pleasure and even toddled round to DH's house after, just to tell him how much I'd liked it. (This article is

sponsored by Sanyo Hughes Inc.) I liked it not merely because it was to some extent *une pièce à clé*; after all the only pleasure there is that of putting this theatrical analogue to that real face. And there was more to it than finding out what was going on in DH's mind six years previously. What is special about *Commitments* is the author's artful achievement in rendering politics, especially the politics of the far left, dramatically potent in a way that is purely theatrical and never didactic. Unlike most of his contemporaries who write 'political' plays Hughes was quite evidently concerned not to preach; this play has nothing in common with the work of bores like Howard Brenton who seem to think that their earnest ranting will put the world to rights.

When I met Dusty 10 years ago he was a low budget sybarite who enjoyed the company of young escorts and who wore what are – so a girl I know tells me – called 'interesting trousers'. His trousers were, indeed, so interesting that many of us feared that they might impair his generative powers. Not so. (Hullo Lil. No put it down, that's Daddy's medicine, not baking powder.) In order to suggest to a vegetarian couple who had outstayed their welcome at a friend's flat that it was time for them to go, he took some slices of liver, put them in the fly of his interesting trousers and walked into the room they were occupying. This was far more effective than cruder, Rachmanesque ploys. Round about the same time he got so bored at a dinner party by a man with a pet subject and a loud voice that he crawled under the table and bit him in the thigh. The man shrieked, shut up, left. There was, you see, little about DH to suggest that he was on the point of diving into the pudding, especially into that part of the pudding called the Socialist Labour League (now the Workers' Revolutionary Party). The way these parties change their names is a bit like the way unsuccessful pop groups change theirs – maybe a new name will bring new luck. The SLL/WRP is the showbiz party, the one that Bernard Levin cleverly called 'Vanessa's Loonies'. In *Commitments* DH calls the party to which his characters belong the Revolutionary Socialist Party – he need hardly have bothered to be so polite.

I suppose it might be charitable to suggest that DH joined the SLL in order to further his theatrical career. After all it was a way to get to know Vanessa and Corin and Kika and Clive and Tom and Frances – quite a good way, even if it did involve having to peddle *News Line*. But perhaps I should not be so kind, perhaps there was more to it than opportunism, perhaps he really did believe or convince himself that he believed, perhaps he just wanted to *belong*. It's not something about which he is keen to talk and the play (which is ironically, even cynically titled) gives little clue. It does however give a strong clue as to why he left the party. He left because whilst he was able to reconcile socialism with freedom of thought and action (in the way, say, that the Catalans can) his fellows were zealots who considered them incompatible (in the way that a sort of English lefty always does – the texts of Marx and Lenin and Trotsky are treated in the way that fundamentalist Christians treat the Bible).

No doubt others have left for similar reasons, but they have not made art out their disillusion. What we've got here is not a picture of one of those melodramatic turnabouts of a self-proclaiming, quasi-religious sort (The Paul Johnson Story by Ken Russell), in which the protagonist jumps to the opposite pole and proceeds to gnash at the spiritual hand that formerly succoured him. What we've got is a knowing comedy about the impossibility of adherence to an ideology if one does not accept that ideology as a Christian must accept the Resurrection, i.e. as an article of *faith*. If you do not have this faith all you've got is a map to which you have to make the terrain correspond. Don't join in.

1982

You Fucking Puff: An Investigation of Anonymous Letters

From birth we are bound to our names and our faces. They are the signs of our identity, the means by which we are recognized. The legitimate circumstances in which we can shed or change them are few. It is the prerogative of the actor, and practically no one else, to pretend to be someone other than himself – those who change their names or employ aliases are viewed with the greatest suspicion and are assumed to have something to hide or to be up to no good. One of the means traditionally, but now rarely, employed by actors in assuming a role is the mask, now largely replaced in the West by make-up, realistic costume, gesture, stance, etc. befitting the character portrayed. The actor behind the mask, aware that his face is not visible to his audience, casts aside his inhibitions and feels free to perform in a way that he would never dare to if unprotected.

Similarly the abusively malicious opinions committed to paper by anonymous and pseudonymous correspondents may well almost contradict those that they hold and offer as their own within the society they inhabit. The casting aside of one's name, or the adoption of some sort of sobriquet, coupled with an attempt at a quasi-biblical style (borrowed, presumably, under the misapprehension that God writes like an apostle) grants the writer a vicarious omnipotence. Deluding himself that he (I'm not being sexist, women are just as ready with their pens as men) is on the side of righteousness, the law, the good, the proper, the sane etc., the writer chooses to express his frequently crankish and small-minded opinions by a means which entirely negates the stand he is taking: he adopts a form of communication that is quite evidently all contradictory to

the moral message he is imparting. Yet the self-delusion is not total; were it so the writer would not fear to link his name to his utterances, he would be so blinded by the strength of his opinions that he would really believe that there was nothing shameful about expressing them. As it is, he employs a fittingly low form of communication whose baseness he tries to mitigate by this recourse to biblical language and, sometimes, an impersonal, God-like, nom de plume. (The Watcher, a Harbinger of Reason, Man in the Crowd etc.) The use of purple or of any non-vernacular style of writing is of further advantage to the writer in that it serves as something of a disguise – it is an effective blanket covering all idiosyncrasies of speech and/or writing style. However, it must be pointed out that the lengths to which correspondents go to disguise themselves are not so great as one is led to believe in the fiction and the films on the subject; few, it appears, have the time or energy to cut headlines out of newspapers and conscientiously paste them together in a coherently abusive form. Anonyms and the poison pen are frequent props in detective and mystery fiction and are, in that context, endowed with the same sort of 'safety' as murder, assault and indeed any crime of a non-sexual nature. Even Enid Blyton wrote a book round the subject. *The Mystery of the Spiteful Letters*, the chief fault of which from a verisimilar point of view is the apparent lack of motive – other than pure malice – of the writer, who turns out to be an ugly, frumpish and foul-tempered charwoman.

The conditions, physical, emotional, environmental and circumstantial which result in the desire to send hateful letters are numerous and varied. It is quite evident that the setting-down and sending-off of deeply-rooted and, more-often-than-not, highly-prejudiced opinions provides a release of a sort, yet by no means everybody lacking a forum where they can vent their grudges feels compelled to seek such a potentially harmful outlet. The motives in the ten thousand odd cases reported to the police annually in Great Britain include jealousy, racial, religious, social and political prejudice, unrequited and unspoken love and, of course, blackmail. It would

be foolish to rigorously classify correspondence and conveniently file each case as pertaining exclusively to this or that category: many letters – and this testifies to the confused, unreasonable and pitiful thinking of their authors – aim wildly at so many targets that their effect resides purely in the *fact* of their receipt, in their shock value. The sheer lack of intelligence that informs many letters by no means dampens the blow to the victim, especially if he belongs to one of those minorities well-used to abuse of every sort – homosexuals, political radicals, or members of practically every non-white race in Great Britain.

A clerk of Jamaican origin, resident in Edgbaston, and his English wife were the recipients of numerous hateful letters after the birth of their first child. Several of these letters present an extraordinary paradox. They heap abuse on interracial marriage, imputing that it contravenes 'natural laws', yet accuse the parents of irresponsibility in bringing a child into an overcrowded world, thus, by implication, advocating contraception which is, of course, a negation of nature. (That's a statement, not a moral judgement). One of the letters contained, in the same paragraph, the following two sentences:

'Where is it written that black bucks should cohabit with our women and give them black bastards?' and: 'Every birth is a crime against those already here, there are enough mouths to feed without adding to the problem.' However, as already pointed out – that the two base sentiments so expressed should be mutually contradictory is hardly likely to diminish the shock to the recipients; the very lack of reason and logic may well serve to augment the initial pain.

A Gloucestershire woman, acquitted at a magistrate's court of cruelty to a horse, was already guilty in the eyes of the fifty 'animal lovers' who saw fit to chastise her further. 'At first,' she says, 'with a dozen or so letters I got the day after the report of the hearing, I just laughed it off. Then they kept arriving and it really became upsetting; not because there were so many of them, you see, but because I thought that if people could write that sort of horrible thing they might

not stop there. The thought is always there and I started to feel terrorized.' The near pathological hate felt for anyone suspected of cruelty to animals is probably an exclusively Anglo-Saxon trait, as is the equation of sexual abstinence and monogamy with patriotism.

The hypocrisy of writers of letters and of anonymous phone-callers to people whose sexual activities or opinions on sex do not adhere to the rigid code inherited from the nineteenth century is quite blatant. A. V. Roe, aeronautical engineer, founder of Avro Aviation and husband of Marie Stopes, was the butt of a vast amount of abuse as a result of his wife's crusade for contraception. He was condemned as a traitor to his country, his class and mankind in general. Needless to say the volume of offensive mail to Dr Stopes was enormous and continued to grow long after her views had been endorsed by the medical establishment. Dr Martin Cole, the all-purpose sex counsellor, has received numerous abusive letters, one of which reads: 'Do you know sir that you are a sexual pervert yourself and will no doubt finish up in a mental home – they all do,' and is signed, quite incredibly, 'Yours truly, F.A.M.' Another, perhaps less vicious letter is signed 'Yours faithfully.' That the unknown correspondents should take their leave in such a manner is more telling than at first it might appear; it's not simply a case of a sugar-coating on a bitter pill, but rather a pointer to an unthinking, conventional and ordinary conception and acceptance of society's mores . . . end an anonymous letter as if it were a get-well note! Correspondents to sexual reformers manifest their vulgarity in their inability or refusal to recognize that the society they inhabit is constantly evolving and that the new standards it sets for itself are not, because they are different, baser than those which applied, say, a couple of decades ago. Through veils of illusion they imagine that they can spy a not-so-long-past era when men were men, women women and the twain never met save when so authorized by God and State. Naturally, they're fooling themselves; but it's equally evident that repression and frustration are perpetual and recurring human conditions and that the moral and ascetic stand taken by those who rail against any

form of sexual licence is, more often than not, tinged with jealousy, lust and resentment towards those who lead a full and satisfying sex-life.

Hence the much more dangerous sort of malicious letter – that which menaces members of minorities who, due to the pressures of a generally intolerant society (especially in the provinces), have to make a display of 'normality' in order to survive. Poison-pen letters to homosexuals, lesbians, 'deviants', etc. are, however, not always blackmail notes. The language in the following letter received by a 32-year-old homosexual living in West London is so full of sexual terms that it seems probable that the writer, despite his professed disgust at the recipient's activities, really envies him and his courage to lead the life that is *natural and right for him.* (The fact that the recipient is homosexual is, then, perhaps irrelevant – the fact, however, that he is not a coward is of great importance.) The letter is as follows: 'You fucking puff. You fucking mincing puff. I see you going in and out with others like you. Your sort ought to be exterminated. You are dross and filth. You put your cocks in each other's mouths. Biting and chewing till you burst all wet and white. I bet there isn't a trick you don't know. How long do you keep your prick up their asses? I see you like smooth-skinned ones. Soft fairy ones. Do you like stroking them till they come all over you? Then you make them lick it up. One day one of them will ram his down your throat and choke you. The best thing that could happen to you.' This is one of four letters, all in similar vein and obviously products of the same hand, that this man received over a period of six months. Often, and not only in the case of blackmail threats, the recipient, fearing recriminations, may be too scared to inform the police and so lays himself open as a target of further aggression and psychological violence. The root of this trouble runs far deeper than it does with merely weak and unbalanced writers. Until it becomes generally accepted that the terms 'normal' and 'deviant' are fraudulent and inaccurate, designed to comfort and support a society which kids itself that it possesses a rigid and definitive structure, till then anyone who leads a life that

calls into question this structure is liable to be the prey of what might be termed the *petty bourgeoisie's hidden weapon.* This is not to suggest that this pernicious weapon would cease to be used were more genuinely liberal attitudes to prevail, but that it would not be feared in such a climate and so would be redundant. The fear of chastisement or ridicule, of losing the means whereby one gains one's bread, of having to make frequent changes of address lest the past (or the post) catch up etc. – all the terrible strains experienced by those who defy the strait-jacket of their smug surroundings are *imposed* on the outsider, they are not natural; no one ever feels guilt till he is made to feel it. Most writers of anonymous letters subscribe, whether consciously or not, to the belief that didacticism is their duty, that they are peculiarly ordained to tell others what to do. They share this belief with tub-thumping politicians who appeal to the lowest emotions and with gossiping doorstep fishwives. They moralize, pass judgement and in so doing show themselves to be far more abject than any of those whom they condemn. Yet it would be erroneous to contend that anonymous letter writers generally belong to those ranks of society in which idle gossip is the norm.

It seems likely that correspondents (the police concur with this) who do not adopt an 'omniscient' and 'superhuman' stance may well disguise themselves with the style, vocabulary and handwriting appropriate to someone of no education. Such a mask is just as effective as any other and is probably advantageous to the writer in that he feels no need to be cryptic – *he can be as brutal as he likes.* This descent to the lowest common denominator of expression is again paralleled in political life: witness the rantings of men such as Enoch Powell and recently crippled but still smiling George Wallace. (Incidentally the mistrust provoked by the mention of anonymity is well-illustrated by the reply I received from a Member of Parliament in answer to a request I made when researching this article that I 'might be allowed to see any letters he had received.' He wrote: 'If you imagine for one moment that I would allow you a glimpse of the poison pen letters I might have received you labour under a delusion . . . who in their

senses would provide any further ammunition for blackmail . . .' He went on to include a certain amount of rather witless personal abuse and concluded: 'You will probably find a mug or two – with the population explosion there's more than one born every minute.' It would be too easy to claim that the worthy member, who must fittingly remain unnamed, was suffering from acute paranoia, but there can be no mistaking his irate indignation at what he obviously considered a gross intrusion of his privacy.)

It's an irrefutable fact of human (or Western) nature that we fear those who, by no matter what means, penetrate our defences, overstep the mark with too personal remarks or challenge the efficacy of our images. The anonymous letter-writer invariably exploits this fear by alluding to further knowledge he has of his victim so that no matter how inaccurate his accusations he still succeeds in instilling a feeling of shock and bewilderment. This is the pattern in several of the most celebrated British poison-pen cases, notably those centred on Sheringham and Littlehampton in the early Nineteen Twenties. These two affairs, perhaps not altogether coincidentally, bear a striking resemblance to each other. In both towns 'prominent' citizens received malicious letters over a considerable period of time, in both cases young women were indicted and after lengthy and complicated trials acquitted. In both cases the accused pleaded in their defence that they too had received anonymous letters, and both, during the course of their trials did receive defamatory letters of which they were certainly not the authors. The press coverage was extensive, sensationalist and probably quite unnecessary – it is a commonplace that newspaper reports frequently lead to an outbreak of correspondence, which frequently mimics the original; it seems fairly likely that whoever wrote the Sheringham letters (the mystery remains a mystery) was influenced by reports of the Littlehampton trials.

The Littlehampton case presented an extraordinary legal tangle. A Mrs Gooding was twice convicted, mainly on the evidence of a Miss Swann, of sending obscene letters through

the post. Later the police satisfied themselves of her innocence and she received financial compensation. Miss Swann was then arrested following a postmaster's vigil with, incredibly, a periscope, and tried and acquitted. At a subsequent trial, she was found guilty on a similar charge and imprisoned. A contemporary news feature referred to: '. . . a sad example of the mental aberration caused by suppression or repression of the sexual element in human nature.' Plus ça change etc.

The weird compound of sentimentality and violence, of moralizing and abuse, of threats and 'commonsense' advice is just the same in present day letters as it was fifty years ago and will, in all probability, remain so fifty years hence.

1972

Foot and Mouth: Chas 'Dr Rock' White

When Geoff, who used to be on the force and is now Scarborough's top Ford dealer, celebrates his fortieth birthday his adventurous wife Jenny and two friends of hers, Corinne and the dark one, dress in corsets, stockings, rozzer helmets and stage-plod jackets and run into the lounge where the two dozen guests have just supped a big ham dinner off their laps and sing 'A Policeman's Lot Is Not A Happy One'. The mail-order sex-clothes, with their connotation of car-keys-in-the-middle-of-the-room, accord oddly with the larky innocence of this party where smoke bombs are exploded while Jenny's brother does his vicar turn in the garage, where pass-the-parcel is played (and won by Geoff: his prize, a model of a Ford police car) and where the order of the evening is souped-up bonhomie and smartish casual threads. It is not easy to imagine someone from this middle English pond doing anything but flounder in the big rough sea where the mail-order gear is from Lili St Cyr or Frederick's and is worn in earnest, where the keys are those of Cadillacs and Jags, where the explosions are caused by freebasing in the john. Charles White doubtless managed the change OK because, though he may frequent it, he is not *of* the pond; not, mark, that he is of the big rough sea either. He is, as Jenny puts it, 'Mr Personality', he's what's called 'a character' – indeed he is happy in this appellation, he's everyone's friend, a man of patent generosity and big heartedness and indefatigable prolixity. The point is, wherever he finds himself he is liable to stand out. His unselfconsciousness is such that self-advertisement comes easily. This is not a man who is scared to make a fool of himself. I don't think that 'nothing ventured, nothing gained'

was among the battery of maxims he bunged at me during the couple of days I spent with him but it might as well have been: how else would an early middle aged chiropodist in a run down English seaside town become official biographer to Little Richard, write that book to universal – well, rock universal – acclaim and eventually persuade his subject, his hero, the 'quasar' of rock, back into a recording studio? And what happens when you trade the curt suffix MChS for a screaming letter-head that reads like a CV and carries your photo and one of Little Richard too, when you announce yourself on T-shirts and that same letter-head as 'Dr Rock'? What, improbably, happens in the case of Chas White is that you appreciate more than ever the value of home, of your own patch and mates. The rock biz's personnel comprises one per cent stars, 99 per cent groupies: fixers, publicists, A&R bods, lowest of the low hangers-on, trash you wouldn't buy a second hand song from, session zombies with two riffs and a stash of coke, rock 'writers'. Such persons suffer a collective delusion that to have shared a line with Jimmy from Rodent Swastika or Trace from Handsome Cripple means that they've caught stardom rather than a nasty habit. No such thing has happened to Chas White. He remains a *fan*, his close proximity to ephemeral 'legends' has not contaminated him socially even if it has left a tiny cultural stain – I mean, for instance, the rather corny Americanisms that litter his prose and his characterization of musicians as 'fantastic guys'.

Had he been anything other than a fan he'd never have got to meet the most fantastic of the guys, Little Richard. No one but a devoted fan would have endured so much, would have been prepared to suffer such paltry humiliations: the road to Richard was unmapped, pocked with pratfalls. This fan began, like all fans, as a teenager, listening to US Forces Network in Ireland and collecting records – his collection is worth about £250,000 now. He first saw Little Richard on stage at Mansfield in Nottinghamshire on one of the singer's 'comeback' tours in the early sixties. He moved to Scarborough in the middle of that decade and for ten years rock and roll was merely his passion, merely . . . Then he was invited to lecture

at the local tech college on the history of rock – this was the seventies when liberal studies were exceptionally liberal. That led to his being invited to host local radio programmes in Hull and Newcastle and York; he might have been born to broadcast. The BBC realized this and he was commissioned to do shows for Radio One. He was of course never shy about proclaiming his enthusiasm for Little Richard whose biography he began in a speculative way. What set the ball rolling was a meeting between a former BBC sound engineer, who had gone to the USA to work for Neil Diamond, and Little Richard's producer, the inevitably 'legendary' Bumps Blackwell whom Chas describes as 'cultured, a UCLA graduate'. Blackwell, who died in 1985, worked with many of the major figures of American popular music from Billie Holliday through Ike and Tina Turner, Sam Cooke, Lloyd Price to Bob Dylan. He was intrigued by what he heard of Chas and his project and invited him to Los Angeles. Chas stayed with Blackwell for a couple of weeks; there was no sign of Little Richard. 'He was heavily into theology, Bumps. He'd wake me up at five in the morning and ask me "Who's God?". He was very well informed, friendly with Glenn Ford and Robert Wagner.' Then Richard appeared briefly. Chas gave his idol his manuscript and his collection of photos, many of which Richard had never seen. Richard was apparently suspicious – there were already two journalists, one from *Time Life*, the other from *People* magazine, attempting to get themselves signed on as his official biographer. Chas was billeted in a non-air-conditioned bungalow belonging to Blackwell in North Hollywood. This was a test of 'loyalty' devised by Richard. 'It was pure hell. But I had to go through it if I wanted to do the book.' A fortnight later Richard dropped by and announced: 'The Lord has sent Dr Rock to write my life story!'

Little Richard is not, as Chas points out, 'a literary man'. What decided him in Chas's favour was the trove of photos – including one taken with the Beatles, and Chas's preparedness to wait around in temperatures of 100 plus for the chance to meet him again. Chas's work had only just begun: 'If you're

writing a biography of John Mortimer or Anthony Clare all you have to do is talk to *them* but with someone like Richard who's about sixteen different people you're going to have to talk to everyone they've ever known.' Which Chas did. Richard was delighted with the result, which is a bizarre mix of salacious detail and kitschy repentance. His delight with Chas was such that when Warner Brothers wanted to get the fifty year old rocker back into a recording studio for the first time in six years they employed Chas as 'negotiator', a role that evidently required great patience and greater verbosity. Richard eventually succumbed; Chas has, in his way, just as much voice as Little Richard.

Because he has taken on board so little of the (unwittingly) mock heroic posturing of rock and roll his involvement in that milieu seems all the more strange: does he lead a double life? Dr Rock and Mr White? Double is an underestimate: Chas White enjoys multiplicate existences. I know – so do we all. But not, I reckon on this scale, on his scale. Certainly few of us, save diligent polygamists, can lead lives so rigorously compartmentalized as his. The only link between Chas the Chiropodist, Chas the Rock Buff, Chas the Environmentalist, Chas the All Year Round Sea Swimmer, Chas the Pillar Of Community and Chas the After Dinner Speaker is Chas the Self Publicist; he is someone who likes to let the world know what he is up to – and whether the world is two men and a dog in a pub or the audience of one of his local radio or telly shows does not, it seems, much matter. The lecturer who told him twenty five years ago that 'you didn't kiss the Blarney Stone, it fell on you' got it right, the man is an ambulatory billboard of himself. Yet – and this must sound like an oxymoron, a U-turn – he is engaging, blessed with a certain humility. He actually possesses the sort of guilelessness that his contemporary compatriot, the supreme professional Irishman of his generation, Terry Wogan, can only pretend to possess. When Chas asks me 'And what time did you caress consciousness this morning?' he does not put inverted commas around it. And when he says 'It's a great life, so grab it, it's not a rehearsal' there is no irony in his voice. Doubt is

not among his strong suits. But isn't it strange that such an enthusiast for Life should be quite so devoted to so stunted a genre of music as rock and roll? Well it is surely. But it's not half so strange as his spending his working life among ingrown toenails, corns, foot fungi, dropped arches and bunions: these pedal infirmities are his bread and butter. Chas the Chiropodist looks different from Chas the Biographer – it's not just that the white coat and the cryosurgical apparatus for removing verrucas (also good for piles, facial warts, naevuses etc) and the scalpels and bottles of Betadine and Monophytol lend him a specifically chiropodical air; it's rather that when he's got his head down between a septuagenarian's feet or when he lifts it above those same feet to tell me of other feet – feet you could smell down two flights of stairs because of the bacteria in their sweat glands and which threatened a marriage, feet whose nails had remained uncut over fourteen years – his face takes on an expression of happy concentration and the burden of deciding which is the very best out-take of Tutti Frutti is lifted from him. Once you've got him on to the subject of chiropody he's quickly into overdrive: he recalls the plague of verrucas that swept Britain in the late sixties; he shows off colour-plates in text books – it's quite amazing, the things that shoes hide; he tells you that when he was a student 'chiropody politics were run with all the subtlety of a runaway tram'; he tells you, rather mysteriously, that 'chiropody used to be the hobby of colonels' wives in Knightsbridge who did it because they needed something to do while their maids polished the brass doorknocker.' This image, of genteel amateur foot doctors hacking at feet in the hinterland of Harrods, has a faintly sinister period charm to it. But I wonder how accurate it is: Chas certainly possesses a notion of class that is entirely of his own devising. The people he refers to as 'aristocrats' (with the emphasis on the second syllable) may merely be ex-officers of above field rank or toilers who've copped gongs.

Leave his surgery with him and walk round the town and it's clear that he really does know everyone, from guys laying paving stones to teachers to doctors to restaurateurs to the Sister of the private hospital where his friend El Foundo (not

his real name) is laid up. The demands of chumship would fatigue a lesser man. And if he doesn't know someone he still finds himself in conversation with them – effortlessly, it just seems to happen. He likes it, even when the people he chats to are gauche yobs with petrol colour cocktails in their fists he likes it. Indeed his philanthropy would be total and indiscriminate were it not for: a) 'these nouveaux riches', who own amusement arcades or fairgrounds, drive Mercs, live in flashy new houses – most of them have done time, been bankrupt, got PhDs in graft; b) the local councillors; a) and b) are of course unconnected.

Although Scarborough is not, by the standards of many provincial towns, the victim of shoddy development and corporate assertion it has suffered some bad losses. And a plaque attached to the exterior of Cuthbert Brodrick's vast Grand Hotel announces that it 'was formerly Europe's premier hotel'. It was, too. Now it's owned by Butlin's and the Piranesian hall is ranked with chairs for oldsters and through the PA system is broadcast on Radio Butlin's the voice of an employee describing his excitement at his OBE award. But the place is at least standing. You can be sure that were any threat made to it Chas would be in there fighting. Right now he's taking on the council over its unpleasant proposal to pump all the town's sewage into the middle of the North Bay thus killing off much of the fishing and guaranteeing that raw sewage is carried back on to nearly all the beaches from South Bay to Cleethorpes almost 50 miles away. The current arrangement dumps the sewage alarmingly close to the shore but at four different outfalls, each signalled by an action pack of gulls; this allows the stuff to disperse. Chas and a group of his friends call themselves the Sons of Neptune and claim to swim all the year round: I must say that I didn't witness this. I played football on the beach with some of the Sons (Chas, Freddie the solicitor, Cedric the bookie) and noted that despite the proximity of the December sea none of them rushed into it. If the Sons are anything like as aggressive in their fight with the council as they were during this Sunday morning game

they are sure to win; indeed they have already won one round.

Chas and I walked the cliffs near Scalby Mills. The wind puckered the sea, tried GBH on us, flattened the grass, bounced birds. Chas's spiel was conservationist till a gust clouted him and he exclaimed 'Hallelujah!' The word opened a sluice in his brain and the next half hour was rock and more rock – one Chas had barged another out of the way. He went on about how he had hoped to get the gig as Tina Turner's biographer, about the hoops he had put himself through to get to Little Richard (contacts, blarney and superhuman patience helped too), about the way Dion despised the lyrics of 'The Wanderer'. We were at Bram Stoker's house looking through the mist at the breakers in Robin Hood's Bay: the dislocation between that giant horseshoe of grey sand and the fairground sleaze of 'I tear open my shirt and there's Rosie on my chest' seemed total. And here was where Dracula had entered a man's mind a century ago. All these phenomena, exterior and imagined and remembered, were jostling for place as they do with Chas White every day. After a series of detours (to the house of one of the Sons of Neptune who wasn't in and to another who was and gave us Amaretto for tea) we drove back to Scarborough. Every roadside place tells a story: that pub's new landlord is not a patch on his predecessor, that's where so and so whose best man I was lives, that's where Tom Laughton (the hotelier brother of Charles) is buried – 'the biggest bloody grave in an Anglican churchyard, and he was a Catholic'.

Chas lives away from the sea and the private hotels and the sunset homes in a semi-detached Victorian villa with his wife Ann, whom he met 'over feet' as a chiropody student, and their very self possessed fifteen year old son Liam. Their daughter is a student in London.

'You Catholic, Chas?'

'Turn that *pop* music off, Liam!'

'Yes he is,' says Ann grinning.

'I'm not,' says Chas.

This is perhaps the one thing Chas won't own to being. Of

course he's catholic, small c, none more so. It's almost time for Geoff's party. Ann ponders whether to drink beforehand. Chas says 'Rather have a bottle in front of me than a frontal lobotomy' and pours something. Then he looks ahead to midweek when he has to address a Farmer's Club. He tries out a Hitler gag on me. He tells of his fears about addressing ranks of postprandial Rotarians. He confides his Secret: 'Treat people like you want to be treated yourself.' And he adds, 'A lot of people want to have their toes cut off but I won't do it.'

1986

Joustabout

This place is a dream of the olden days, or dayes. Chilham definitely belongs to the olden days which is when they wore funny clothes and wrote in gothic script. Here's a gothic graffito: it reads 'XVth Century Inn'. Here's another: 'Peacock Antiques' – that one is inscribed on a metal signboard wrought immemorial centuries back. The building it is hung from is a Wealden half-timbered number so immaculately black and white it dazzles like an object of the Op epoch which is also the past but not yet ye olden days – the olden days were a long time back, so far back that they're heritage. And the thing with heritage (prop. English Tourist Board) is that unlike the ordinary, marketable past no one is around now who was around then. You can take liberties with it the way you can't with, say, the Fifties when everyone wore drape jackets and drove cars with fins or the Forties when it was always raining and there was always Brylcreem on the Hovis in station cafés. This far past is a chronal stew – what's a couple of hundred years here or there? And, besides, no one's claiming that it's in earnest . . . It's a game, a lark, a smart alliance of the repro trade and showbiz and popular 'education' which combines to package epochs into tripper-friendly displays. And yet, for all that, the emblematic spectacle elected to represent the Middle Ages in this pageant of the plastic past is one which retains the fundamental drama and danger it must always have had. Jousting hurts, at least the jousting done by the men in funny clothes just now riding into the square at Chilham hurts. The people in the square, or that bit of it not occupied by red Astras and grey Sierras and handsome Escorts, know just what to do. They've come prepared. They've come in clothes which

proclaim 'Fun Unlimited' and 'Old Albanians RFC', and they adopt poses that enable them to capture for all time this bit of the past: photography fosters a gamut of stances as formal as cricket's. For a moment the illusion is complete and only the right sort of cavalier is in frame. But, for those camera happy trippers who missed the photo opportunity or were poorly positioned, help is at hand and it's the offer of help that mars the illusion: 'Right then, round again, down that side . . .' Black Gauntlet's voice is not a notably courtly one, it has a music hall rasp to it, a bit of barker's charm – which, given its owner, is apt. A horse dressed for jousting is a work of hippic surrealism. The heraldically devised caparison which covers it amends its proportions, makes it mutate into a beast that is fabulous and frightening; the holes for its eyes recall those in the masks of fetishistic murderers, they prompt the idea of black pantomime, of wicked circus, nightmare carnival. And this transformational potency is not restricted to the mount: a man in tabard and mail and – most of all – a helmet which is also a mask is no longer quite a man but a contiguous adjunct of the beast whose clothes match his. There's a terrifying unity here. The quadrupedal machine that charges along the fence called a tilt at 30mph is way beyond that state which, apropos horse and jockey, is styled 'at one'. This is a triumph of the garment trade over the gulf between horse and man. The *thing* that belts across this patch of green and pleasant (backdrop: an avenue of ash with the biggest boles you've ever seen) is a caterpillar from hell, which is where caterpillars are fed red meat and steroids. When this thing divides itself into its components it adds up to a normal looking horse wearing a dress and a normal looking fellow who may be a computer programmer for Mercantile Credit, a clerk for a clearing bank, a local government officer, a teacher. Or it may add up to a normal looking horse in a dress and Max Diamond whose heterodox trades include song writer ('My Boomerang Won't Come Back'), song plugger, stuntman, Reader in Philosophy at the University of Life, tournament director. Max is a gent who tirelessly pretends to be 'over 42', who runs a course called – of course – Knight School, who lives over the

Victorian stables at Chilham Castle whose keep belongs to the period that his tourneys are meant to illustrate and whose more recent begetter was Sir Herbert Baker, architect of Pretoria. 'Broke my back in Cape Town, in seven places, and my skull – fractured. Need a needle before the Bank Holiday' – points at left shoulder – 'cortisone. Let's 'ave another spritzer.' Gets up, pours same. This is in the caravan across the stable yard where the invented past, in the form of an Andalucian stallion, 24, and still in full gear, rubs up against the discarded present, in the form of a broken washing machine with polythene tubs on its top. These tubs contain such props of the past as the black paint that the hooves of Max's mount require. Beside Max in the caravan, which is German, refrigerated, 'wood – not plastic', air-conditioned and comfortable, lies a copy of *The Showman's Guide '87*. Max, a showman of – generous guess – 65 years, wants to keep jousting till he has overcome the record number of jousts of William Marshall who was at it, way back when, till he was 72. 'And I'm over 42 now you know . . .'

What actually happens when Max and Nick and Alan and Mark ('who went to Leatherhead yesterday to learn fire-eating') joust jolts all expectation. The business of knightly names is lame and bogus: suspended disbelief is a non-starter. But wiv knightly *games*, John, we're looking at a very different k. of f.: we're looking straight in the face of danger, at death's head. Because this is England and because the English have this thing about animals many protestations about the lack of risk to the horses are made over a PA on top of a Vauxhall hatchback by Mrs Max Diamond in a gold-shot frock and book-of-hours hat. 'No horse has ever been injured . . .' etc. This is astonishing; for when Jerry Richardson, a 30 years old magazine publisher from Sutton near Croydon, gets on a 16 cwt nag and aims it at another (same psycho eyes, same weight) ridden by computer programmer Nick Billingham from Maidstone you feel you're looking at tomorrow's dog food on the hoof. Well, you're not – and the fact that you're not is because these guys are *precise* and expert. The appeal of the spectacle is not like that of wrestling (fake throws and

effortful grunts), it's more like dressage done at considerable speed. And until you see a novice having a bash you don't con quite how difficult and dangerous it really is. Even a minor tip can produce a tiresome injury. One rider, Alan Haselup, ended the day with a set of weals on his chest which made him look as though he had been branded. The potential hazards are legion. Horses, Max Diamond is fond of repeating, have small brains: "They can be bloody slags. They can make you look such a berk." The exigencies of the paying spectacle require that the tilt is 'open', an unfilled in frame that allows the crowd to see both horses at once – in the Middle Ages the tilt was a solid fence; now, while this suits the spectators it does not delight the horses which, convinced they're going to collide, tend to shy away at the last moment or, worse, put their brakes on. And going over a horse's head in a suit of armour is no joke. Nor is being on the receiving end of a bamboo lance: the idea is to aim for your opponent's shield but things can go awry. The lances are, incidentally, inauthentic but, if anything, more dangerous than the hollowed ash that used to be used. Further the lists at Chilham are on a marked slope of the Stour valley which means that the thing hurling itself down the bank is liable to attain a parlous pace. As well as jousts the bill at Chilham (and at Belvoir Castle which is the only other place where competitive rather than display tourneys are held) includes riding at a quintain, spearing heads and lancing rings. A quintain is a swinging target attached to a post: the target may represent an enemy such as a Saracen or may merely be something to aim at. Lancing rings is just that, hoopla in reverse at very high speed – it demands a mighty blend of eye, strength, co-ordination. So far the theatricality is unmitigated. However two things gang up to deny the grandeur of the occasion. One is the heads that are speared – they are white polystyrene things from a crimper's window; the other is the non-stop banter that Max Diamond and his colleagues go in for. The bubble of belief is punctured once a 'knight' removes his helmet, is magically transformed back into a bank clerk and grabs a microphone to make a bawdy gag. Max calls to the spectators:

'Any lady there want to come and hold my weapon . . . All right . . . all right then just hold on till I get my B . . . R . . . E . . . F . . . back'. Now it may just be that during the full scale tournaments (Bank Holidays only) the knights stay 'in character'; one hopes that they do for the sight of them proceeding from the direction of Chilham Castle towards the lists is breathtaking, and so, as I have suggested, is the early part of the display. Very likely the atmosphere at such a tournament or at one of the rare internationals – a French team visited two years ago – is less playful, and more partisan. The participants certainly go at it harder; as Jerry from Sutton puts it: 'I don't mind getting a broken leg in front of a couple of thousand people, but five hundred – forget it.' This of course begs the question of what amount of injury or mutilation Mr Richardson would be prepared to undergo at Wembley Stadium, and what amount other riders would be prepared to inflict – though it *is* forbidden to deliberately injure an opponent. The Jousting Federation of Great Britain (President and Chairman: Max Diamond) takes a dim view of such misdemeanours and will ban members for up to a year from Federation activities. No doubt these outcast knights turn rogue and join up with one of the cowboy outfits that Max Diamond repeatedly fulminates against: 'Balsa wood lances – pshaw! All faked . . . pony clubs could do it. Now if you get hit in the throat by a *bamboo* lance, I almost swallowed my tongue once . . .' These cowboy outfits are bottom of the jousting pile, just as jousting itself is fairly near the bottom of the equestrian hierarchy – and there are few hierarchies more rigorously delineated than the one which involves the English and their horses. It is of course fuelled by the same sort of dreary snobbism that decrees that to 'kill' salmon is an activity superior to merely fishing for pike. Obviously jousting's cause is not much helped by the preponderance of indifferent displays, but its low rank is more determined by its contamination by showbiz, its ersatz mediaevalism, its occupation of a no man's land between sport and spectacle and, needless to say, the fact that it enjoys neither posh followers nor participants. It seems vastly more satisfying than the wretched hunt

but is of course no springboard for a counter jumper, a joust is not a place where you're likely to rub shoulders with titled halfwits. Because of the absence of continuity of tradition it is bound to be bracketed as a curiosity, a turn – which is rough justice for the men who exhibit such bravery and skill. These are the qualities on which it is founded, and they are not commonplace: the tabards, the theme-parkery, the tosh about gallantry are all red herrings, are worthless without the elemental drama of the event. Never can any activity have been so enhanced yet cheapened by its essential props. Yet the thought of men jousting in modern protective clothing, functional padding, seems only to lend a further stratum of complication to the business of re-creations of former times.

Leave Chilham Castle and you're in the landscape of Powell and Pressburger's *A Canterbury Tale*, a case history of the past's grip on the present, a grip which throttles and which fosters chauvinistic perversity. There are lovely done-up oast houses, spick as paint and really old and the pleaching you see outside the house called Robin's Croft is just the sort you don't see any more.

1987

Play Dirty

If I were Mr Terry Dicks MP the first thing I'd do after changing my name (to Dick – this is an age of *mono*gamy that we're supposed to be living in, Tel) would be to invoke Clause 28 of the Local Government Act against Rugby Football and, specifically, against scrummages which do not merely 'promote' homosexuality but are, obviously, shameless exhibitions of it: scantily dressed men in studded boots and hot pants putting their heads between each other's legs . . . Why, they even have their very own social disease, scrum pox, a form of impetigo which is eagerly contagious and can afflict anyone, not just members of front eights. Get rid of scrums and you're clearly going to knock a major medico-socio-sexual 'problem' on the head.

The same sort of beginners' determinism appears to be the foundation of the government's thoughts on spectator hooliganism. The crude equation, sibling to the one which links violence to its representation on telly, is that 'bad' behaviour on the field of play is liable to foster knife fights and broken bottlescapes on the terraces. Hence the weekly appeal by this or that junior minister – call it Moynihan, call it Luce – for 'a return to sportsmanship and the abandonment of gamesmanship'. Leave aside the fact that these appeals are pretty rich when made by members of a government which learned *its* sportsmanship from Nobby Stiles and Norman Hunter; they are much more fascinating for the several cans of worms they open.

Sportsmanship, like most other British traditions, was a Victorian invention; it was part of the programme of progress and perfectibility that prevailed well into the third quarter of

this century. It was a literally Arcadian notion whose genesis, like much else in the second half of the C19, was to be found in a bogus past – in this case that of Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* which itself represents a courtly ideal in which an analogue of Queen Elizabeth I patronizes games and tournaments which were 'martial exercises without blood'. Encoded in such high minded, high Victorian canons as the Queensberry Rules (1867) is the paramount idea of mitigation: i.e., you can still beat the hell out of someone but you can't beat him to death because you're wearing gloves and have, besides, to stop beating him every 3 minutes. So, to borrow from the vocabulary of a not unrelated form of spectacle, the hard core was proscribed and the soft core institutionalized. The trouble is though that the soft core is unsought save by the ref (and by nature's refs – who tend to be MPs and sports administrators) and by sports writers whose massive reserves of piety, virtue and moral indignation are matched only by their stores of such words as *tarnished, disgraceful, squalid, unforgivable* etc.

I'm afraid I have to admit to a total bereavement of such punctilios. And I'm afraid, further, that I'm by no means alone in owning to a sporting pantheon that includes Ian 'Chucker' Meckiff, Steve Williams, Billy Bremner, Jim Smith, Paul Ringer, Colin Meads, Mark 'The Man Not The Ball' Dennis, Mike Burton, Peter Storey. Every time I hear Bill McLaren refer, as he always does, to 'ill mannered whistling' when Messrs Webb or Hastings or Thorburn is having a pot at goal I want to throw a six pack of Brain Damage at the screen. And when I've finished that six pack there is no more sumptuous pleasure than to close my eyes and take a mnemonic ramble back to Clough's Derby v Revie's Leeds, to Jeff Thomson v Dennis Amis's head, to games uncontaminated by sportsmanship and thus elemental in their conflicts, struggles, jungle mores. And genuinely cathartic too: far from fomenting crowd violence it is as likely that rough stuff on the park satisfies the appetite for it through provision of true drama. There is no obvious correlation between soccer teams with poor disciplinary records and spectator violence – the fighting at the Heysel, remember, occurred before the game; Liverpool was and is a

shamefully clean side (even Steve McMahon who looks as though he has the potential to mix it also possesses the potential to emulate St Bobby Charlton). 'Soccer' violence is no such thing – the purpose of the arena that is hijacked for expressions of belligerence is fortuitous. Far more violent sports than soccer such as ice hockey and rugby union are so far inassociable with crowd trouble even though neither is any longer habitually played with deference to Corinthian niceties – it's just that a different sort of yob 'supports' Paisley Tigers or Wasps RFC to the one that supports Millwall or Luton. It is not for nothing that the rugby teams whose followers tend to put themselves about are those like Bath and Gloucester which represent cities with no tradition of association football; so the bovver gravitates towards what used, wrongly, to be considered the gents' code. The fact that Bath is a famously (and drearily) unsporting team is irrelevant; indeed the antic examples of Messrs Hill and Chilcott are proof of the antithesis to all the above, that foul is not necessarily fair to behold. Bath is a monochrome team: Hill plays like a forward and Chilcott plays like someone auditioning for the freakish villain in the next Bond movie. And Bath's fouls, like its play, are so dismally *uncreative* – they obviously need a few more policemen in their team, urban gladiators in the Dooley/Richards mould, men whom you know are in the right because the maintenance of right is their daily round. And Mr Terry Dicks can be assured that with those two in a scrummage there'll be absolutely no funny business going on, just the routine unsporting questioning of suspects eager to bite a constable's studs.

1988

Come On, You Dog: Night Out At The White City

Our man Varnom pushed two fifths of a pony into my eager paw and suggested that I might turn it into something bigger by going to the dogs. How much bigger? A whole pony maybe, or with a bit of luck a full grown nag – in which case we could chop up the beast and treat our more disadvantaged readers to what a humorous hotel in Canterbury used to call Newmarket Steaks. You see really we want to be in a caring profession – we may look hardbitten but within us beat the hearts of toy librarians and playgroup counsellors. Sad then to report that I came away with no horse at all. I do not blame myself, I rarely do. I blame My Companion, the pornographer Martin Cropper (fittingly, our erections demolished correspondent) who kept giving me tips which he himself seemed disinclined to back but which I, poor fool, thought must be hot because of his evident nous: he talks with casual ease about yankees and accumulators and reverse forecasts, all of which are a mystery to an innumerate like me. He also claims to know people who own dogs – you can tell the sort of company that these smutboys keep.

White City can be a sod to park at. The best thing to do is to drive into the BBC and say that you have an appointment with Alasdair Milne or, if you're common as dirt (and you very likely are if you're going dog racing), that you are a guest on the Parkinson show. Then you want to go to the restaurant. I'm not sure what it's called but it should be called The St Tel after the patron saint of used car dealers. Martyrologists will recall that Tel (né Terry) lived in Toledo and Granada and was incarcerated for his beliefs (or for early Christian log book offences). He spent his imprisonment obsessively filing the

numbers off the fetters round his ankles and demanding sacks of sawdust which he caused to disappear – miraculously. When he went to his death he was delirious, could not remember what town he was in and yelled to the baying crowds that lined his calvary, 'Toledo, goodbye, Granada, goodbye.' In the official hagiography issued by the Motor Trades Federation this appears as 'Toledo, good buy, Granada, good buy.' But I digress. So though did Not Much Cop and Ballylough Ivy whom Cropper had told me to back; both of them had won races the week before though I suppose that on those occasions they had not eaten Valium stew for supper. I went back to my prawn cocktail.

Now don't laugh. My normal diet of course comprises boudins blancs which I have flown in from Caen, lampreys from the Gironde, ortolans from the Landes etc. There are two good reasons for eating prawn cocktail at The St Tel. One is that it is the sort of stuff that such places do a lot of so you can be sure that the prawns will not have been hanging around in their sugar based sauce for too long. The second is that if you speak loudly enough when ordering it the motor traders, 'metal brokers', executive scaffolders, aspirant Rachmans with whom you have elected to spend your evening may possibly think that you are one of them. But possibly not since Cropper spoiled the effect by having potted something or other; and while I got stuck into scampi and chips – what else? – he, with his delusions of upward mobility, ate *osso bucco* which tasted to me like greyhound in tinned vegetable soup. With this we drank a comic little St Emilion – well, not so much comic as fucking hilarious. It had evidently been brewed from banana skins in a Bordeaux back street and it had a nose that needed a nose job.

When the woman who comes to your table to take bets heard that I wanted money on Ballyard Chief she looked at me with some ire. This, I realized, was because she wanted me to win so that she would get a good tip, and she knows what sort of dog Ballyard Chief is. Ballyard Chief is the sort of dog who comes last. 'But it took five of the bastards to put him there,' Cropper remarked by way of explanation for his

continuing imprescience. I went to the lavatory telling him to back Ersanmine in the next – the name, that was the thing to go by. The restaurant is tiered, terraced; I pushed my way past a dwarf arsonist who was keeping his hand in with a flambé kit and past a retired boxer whose woman also looked as if she had seen a bit of fist in her time (on her face I mean). The main difference between them was that he had the more pendulous breasts and was smoking a cigar beside which My Lord Grade's habitual oral companion looks like a Hamlet. The lavatory is one of those places where ammoniac fumes gang up on the mucous membrane of your nose. How can people bear to spend so much time in such places? Tom Driberg and Joe Orton must have had leather lined noses. I got back to a barrage of C'mon my boy, Hurry up you fucker, That's it number one . . . That was it number one. Ersanmine had won. Good dog. Bow wow. I was delighted. Eyebrows and her husband looked less than delighted.

They were on the tier beneath us. He had a moustache so thin it might have been drawn on with an eyebrow pencil, a pair of field glasses and a form book of awesome thickness; he ate lamb cutlets grilled to the colour of Bovril and smoked Seniors. He didn't talk to Eyebrows save to tell her what dog to put money on. She did not wait for the woman to come round but went herself to the top terrace tote. Initially when she kept popping off I thought that she must be incontinent or have come out with a particularly small colostomy bag. Silly. She is called Eyebrows because she had no eyebrows; in their lieu she had extraordinary saracenic constructions, crescents black as anthracite and half an inch thick in the middle. Between these and her eyes were jade wedges and blue streaks and a great bit that I particularly admired which looked as though it had been achieved with Vic Vapour Rub and lard. The rest of her face was pretty good too and so was her all lacquer 1963 Profumo tart hairdo which she kept admiring in a mirror that she would pull from her clutch bag wherein she also kept her penile engorged lipstick. Actually there is a lot of this phallic stuff at the dogs – those cigars of course and the dogs' snouts and the unmistakably detumescent way they keel

over at the end of races. One of them keeled over in an unmistakably detumescent way during races. And, yes, I *had* backed it.

I doubt if the Greyhound Racing Association likes this sort of comment. It is very keen to make the dogs respectable and took great umbrage when the stout actor Mel Smith (who apparently owns a dog) suggested that the business was bent. It is improbable that the GRA will succeed – which strikes me as being a good thing – so long as the sort of people who own dogs are those who name their dogs after orgies or wife swapping parties. I don't know what Shenley Romp 'says' to you but I know what it 'says' to me; it 'says' keys thrown into the middle of the room. It failed to win. So did Quick Action and Fruiti Fred. *Dogs.*

I then did my investigative bit. (This article is actually written by eight people with 'special reporting' by half a dozen others and a whole coachload of researchers out in the carpark waiting to get an in-depth quote from Stanley Bowles.) Getting the bill – two can have a real fun time and enough Danish Blue to entirely anaesthetize their mouths for as little as £237.40p – I approached the people at a nearby table. I did this because a) one of them was most attractive, a bit like Michal Levin who is soon to be Mrs William Shawcross, lucky girl, and b) because they looked as if they earned their livings by some means other than selling cars or receiving stolen goods. I asked them what they did. Property. Ho hum. And they came there because it was 'theatre'. Quite right, it is. Proper theatre, all spectacle. Stuff David Hare (well, marinade him then with lots of juniper berries). Bring on an electric hare, and creatures led by paramilitary uniformed girls, and fanfares, and lights that dim at all the right moments, and two quite wonderful neon raceboards, and tictac men doing their hand-jive with a purpose, and bookies who look like bookies, and punters who look like bookies, and punters who go home empty handed like this one, and punters who go home with bulging wallets and sly smiles . . . Her velvet vice tightened around the very core of his manhood. Ha.

1981

Grapple Me: Wrestling As It Never Was

The world of showbiz and spectacle is one that fosters the creation of stereotype – anything remotely original is so rapidly copied that it soon becomes clichéd and commonplace. The recognizable, the readily classifiable and that which exists within the limits of a convention is far more easily acceptable, is much more readily digested than that which appears, initially at any rate, to stand in a void, without precedent and offering no terms of reference to the spectator. Wrestling, then, is primitive not only because it provides a fundamental and necessary outlet with its scenes of violence and suffering but also because it frequently panders to an audience's desire to see enacted what it believes to be right – the triumph of what is accepted as good over that which is accepted as evil. It is not for nothing that Mick McManus calls himself 'the man you love to hate'; he is, in his role as wrestler, the embodiment of 'evil', even his name suggests 'maniac' or 'mania'. From the moment he enters the ring, uncouth, swearing, gross, disdainful of audience, opponent and referee alike he shows himself to be the villain, and to fulfil his role it is necessary that he should lose, ignominiously and with complete lack of grace, to an opponent who abides by the rules of the game, the 'decent' chap who doesn't wince when hit below the belt, who shows compassion and 'humanity' to his malevolent rival and who succeeds through fearlessness and a steadfast show of strength.

Thus wrestling invites comparison with a variety of dramatic modes. It is evident from the outset in gangster movies that the outlaw, even if he is the hero of the piece, will die in the last reel. In war films we can be sure that if the platoon of

valiant British stock characters is wiped out their efforts will not have been in vain, they will have contributed to the ultimate downfall of the Hun or the Nippon. (The invariable employment of these weighted words with their connotations of 'sub-humanity', strangeness, callousness and immorality serves, in the context, to heighten and accelerate our feelings of hatred of the enemy.) The structure of gangster, war and western films demands that the audience be partisan, identifying with the protagonist, sharing his fears and moments of glory, becoming suitably indignant when he is slighted etc. A great part of the appeal of such entertainments lies in the depiction of all characters and actions as either black or white: for instance it requires little effort or thought to side with the 'nice' girl who has been wronged in a women's serial, and it is equally easy to censure the 'bad' girl who has enticed the nice girl's husband or conceived a child out of wedlock or . . . Just as westerns etc. are modern reworkings of basic and eternal themes so is modern wrestling a not very heavily disguised form of the spectacle that was a hot favourite with the Greeks, the Japanese, the Indians and with most European nations. (The Romans tended to prefer boxing with stone weighted gloves.) Of course modern wrestling is seldom as dangerous to the participants as that practised by, say, the Spartans whose fights, more often than not, culminated in the death of one if not both contestants. Nowadays a bout seldom lasts longer than an hour and, much more significantly, wrestling is no longer considered a testing ground for sheer physical prowess – this is a function of boxing, athletics or any other sport where what is of supreme importance is the result. The performance demanded of the modern professional wrestler requires a different sort of virtuosity – the ability to combine high drama and low comedy, tragedy and slapstick, sheer artifice and apparent naturalism. Yet, in name at least, wrestling remains a sport, which of course doesn't preclude its being regarded as an entertainment, but necessitates distinguishing between sport (or, more correctly, games) and 'pure' entertainment. In all competitive games, especially those whose rules permit a certain degree of bodily contact –

association and rugby football, boxing etc. – there is to be found amongst the spectators a combination of attributes. These include a real or assumed taste for the finer points of the game (the inswinging corner to the near post . . .), an often encyclopaedic knowledge of the performers and their private lives, the presumption that their own opinions on the players' abilities and tactics are of some importance and, above all, a fierce feeling of loyalty to one or other team or contestant. This loyalty, which in certain cases is liable to develop into hysteria (witness Glasgow Rangers supporters in Barcelona or at games with Celtic), may have its roots in local or national pride, in a preference, based on former performance or may be entirely negative, motivated by the desire to see the fighter who beat one's favourite fighter well beaten himself. Most fans would sooner see a game or fight which results in a victory for 'their' side than a purely entertaining contest. ('It was a real drag from start to finish but we won.') If our boys (note the possessive adjective) are entertaining performers who always lose they will be deemed useless by their dwindling supporters and slip a few rungs down the ladder, their position on which is a mark of their prowess. Sports, with their championships, challenge cups and leagues, are amazingly hierarchical.

Now, in all forms of entertainment save perhaps whodunits and revenge dramas the final outcome is not the feature of prime significance. Whilst we listen to a singer we are not concerned with the final bars of the song, watching a juggler we marvel at his dexterity and speed and find ourselves drawn into what has the makings of a drama – will he or will he not succeed in keeping all the plates spinning and not let fall a single hoop – but our primary concern is with the immediate spectacle before us, and this concern is, for want of any other words, aesthetic and sensual. The response elicited by the sight of pro-wrestling combines elements of our responses to competitive games with elements of those to straight entertainment. Wrestling is at once a game which is exploited in such a way as to become an object of popular entertainment and a form of entertainment (closely related to equestrian

feats, clowning and tumbling) which gains an added dimension and appeal by masquerading as a sport. Wrestling is a very fundamental form of theatre.

Certain fans of wrestling are referred to as Followers of Grunt. This is a peculiarly apt epithet for those middle aged women who are to be found at the ringside at nearly all professional contests. Children attending pantomimes frequently warn the hero of impending danger – at the sight of the villain lurking upstage they yell to the oblivious good guy. Although they are fully aware that what they are watching is simply a performance they are eager that the forces of evil should not prevail – the hero and the villain stand for something other than themselves. Quite unconsciously they find themselves participating in a moral drama. To the women wrestling fans, many of whom seem to be built in the Ena Sharples mould, the idea of hero versus villain is an essential part of their entertainment. The business of passing judgement on neighbours and acquaintances is of course coarse and, ultimately, frustrating; the means by which one can make a physical show of censure are few. So aggression is transferred; the gross and powerful body of the wrestler is thus endowed with the violent aspirations of the spectators. Followers of grunt at once admire, fear and yearn for the wrestler. The terms they habitually employ in describing their feelings for the wrestler are violent and crude. 'I'd like to get his log rolling in me . . . He's got the biggest pork sword you've ever seen.' The speaker has naturally not seen it, but no matter, she associates his (theatrical) shows of aggression with the very different aggression of the conquering lover or, better still, the rapist. It is important to differentiate between the violence of the wrestler and that of the footballer who often isn't acting, who is potentially far more dangerous with his speed and his studs – few wrestlers are crippled like Derek Dooley of Sheffield Wednesday or Jimmy Meadows of Manchester City and England. Nor do they die like the South African boxer who fell at the hands of Pat McAteer. Another boxer, Jack Peterson almost lost his sight and Freddie Mills, a

suicide who was probably murdered, went far over the top, punch drunk and groggy.

Just as football fans use the argot of the players and commentators (midfield schemer, aggressive striker, nod it in the back of the net etc.) so, even more incongruously, do wrestling fans flaunt a knowledge of 'technical' terms. The names of holds are generally overcomplicated and picturesquely graphic. Their appeal and effectiveness lies in their evocation of a precise and measured brutality: Fake arm drag with inside back heel trip, Inside crotch pickup, Gizoni underarm movement, Scissors, Guillotine, Forearm smash et al. The use of these terms is a sort of brand name snobbery. The fan deludes himself, and hopes to delude others that he is an insider, an expert with an entrée to a select circle of performers, managers, trainers etc. The brand name snob demonstrates that he is a member of a certain cognoscenti with endless talk about the trivia relating to 'his' subject – wine, cars, perfumes, fine foods or whatever. Preposterously, followers of grunt aspire to a kind of groupiedom; it is only very rarely though in this country that they achieve such heights. In the USA 'grappler girls' are a minor phenomenon. The sheer grossness and ugliness of many wrestlers diminishes their appeal to small time starfuckers who tend to prefer ball players or tennis pros, so girls who pursue wrestlers gain for themselves reputations as 'abnormal and masochistic'. Such reputations are not entirely justified – they imply that wrestlers are likely to behave in bed as they do in the ring. But there can be no doubt that these girls, like groupies of any kind, are initially attracted by the performer, the 'image', and so maybe they do go out in search of brutal hi-jinks.

The sexual appeal of wrestlers is much more obvious and linked with body culture and sexual violence. Whatever other image he may present the wrestler is invariably virile, endowed with bulging biceps, 'iron' stomach, 'lifeguard' shoulders, 'gladiator' back, and barrel chest. Often he has a gigantic stomach too. These attributes form the subject of homoerotic and sadoerotic fantasies. Power and strength are associated with the abuse of power and strength – their

possessors are expected to put them to violent and destructive ends. The appeal of British wrestler Peter Rann is much strengthened by his having worked as bodyguard for Rachman. (Similarly an actor like Alain Delon, in his roles as tough and gangster, is more credible, more suggestive of villainy and perfidy for having been implicated in the killing of his former henchman Markowitz.) The blows inflicted by the fighter give a far greater appearance of being damaging and dangerous than do those of participants in a 'real' fight where both parties are liable to be clumsy and awkward, having little sense of balance or tactics and being ignorant of a suitable counter to a particular blow. They are liable also to do each other considerable harm. The contorted wrestler caught in a Boston Crab or head scissors makes a massive, histrionic show of suffering and pain yet leaves the arena in perfect shape.

The complicated, intricate positions into which fighters manoeuvre themselves are often reminiscent of those adopted by lovers. The proximity of certain holds to positions for mutual oral genital intercourse is naturally a source of excitement and titillation to the homosexual spectator who knows full well that neither wrestler is going to go down on the other, but at the same time cherishes the hope that it might just happen. The slightest suggestion of such a contact seems to suffice to set in motion the mechanism which gives birth to erotic fantasy.

The importance of aural and olfactory contact with wrestlers is probably underestimated by those whose experience of them is limited to TV broadcasts which – and this is an endemic property of that medium – diminish the power of the spectacle, bringing it in to one's own home and so rendering it normal, banal and everyday as well as presenting a reduced rather than an expanded model of the action. (The cinema audience, presented with noses six feet high, giant props, breasts the size of barrage balloons, witnesses what is far more obviously a spectacular performance than does the armchair viewer. The personalities who come over on TV are those who are essentially lifesize, who do not project a superhuman

image.) Bouts in this country are frequently staged in Victorian or Edwardian public baths and halls. They are uncomfortable, lacking in any form of air conditioning, musty and dank; their tiled walls throw back the MC's amplified announcements, the crowd's signs of disapproval and satisfaction and, most importantly, the screams and groans of the contestants. The only lights in the hall are those which illuminate the ring – so the focus of the audience rarely falters. Those in the ringside seats are so close to the fighters that they can not only perceive the sweat on their bodies but smell it too: in the confined, humid space the odour is pervasive, rank and redolent of animals. Attention is drawn from the ring only when the contestants make their way to and from it dressed in outrageously flashy gowns, swearing and snarling. As well as intervening between audience and spectacle the excitable TV commentator (sincere and knowledgeable Kent Walton) by the mere physical presence of his voice further lessens the dramatic effect of the fight. The live audience cannot help but hear the dreadful though admittedly theatrical bellows, the slap of flesh against flesh, the fearful crack of the forearm smash, the shriek of pain, the reluctant yelp of submission – the whole soundtrack which comprises the vocabulary of the fighter.

For Sade, Bataille, Sacher-Masoch and their followers sex is inseparable from cruelty whether received or self inflicted. In a variety of ways certain wrestlers pander to the taste for cruelty, becoming the embodiment of an awesome brutality, representing by theatrical means the most loathsome form of violence – that which is condoned by or performed in the name of the state. The executioner, the masked hangman and the public torturer are all agents of government or legislature invested with the authority to take life or maim. They are the representatives of a barbaric order. Wrestlers who adopt the uniform of these licensed murderers provoke an intense hatred in their audience who experience, in the face of such generally despised persons, a numbing impotence. 'Justice' in such cases is served by the defeat of these fighters, some of whom wrestle under such names as 'The Judge', 'The

Executioner', and 'Doctor Death'; the audience feels it is getting its own back. Followers of grunt have been likened by Nils Bernstein in his study 'The Cathartic Tableau' to the tricoteuses (ex *tricoter*, to knit; whence Tricel, a fabric favoured by grapplers for their singlets to the haggard harridans who sat beside the guillotine, the click of their needles accompanied by squeals of delight at the severing of every head. One only has to compare the expressions on the faces of those in the ringside seats to realize that the comparison is just. The attitudes and expectations of contemporary followers are though very different from those of their French precursors. The latter could be sure that when the captured aristocrat or representative of the old order was brought to the scaffold he would die. The outcome was already decided – whether or not the captive had been judged sentence would be passed and that sentence was invariable. The idea foremost in the minds of the bloodthirsty spectators was that of watching someone *pay* for real or imagined transgressions, for having belonged to a class which had long exploited the common people or simply for being a member of a 'good family'. Wrestling merely provides a model of such executions and so, as has already been mentioned, the audience can't expect to witness death in the ring any more than they can in a violent film. It is patently clear that the actor simulates death; after the take he gets to his feet and walks off the set. The spectator at a public execution, knowing that what he is witnessing is for real, is caught in a sort of mental trap from which there is absolutely no escape, as is the viewer of a documentary film on war crimes – a child whose flesh is burning is a child whose flesh is burning; the pain of observing such a sight cannot be alleviated by an attempt to convince oneself that 'after all it's only acting.'

The only form of wrestling that lacks this sort of 'escape route' is that involving physical freaks or obviously dangerous props. Dwarfs, long popular in vaudeville and circus, have become increasingly frequent attractions in wrestling in America during the last twenty years, as has the practice of chaining together contestants – in such circumstances bodily injury is

more or less unavoidable. For the most part though the unrelenting emphasis on the ceremonial aspects which are a part of all contests distances the spectator, constantly reminding him that he is the passive participant in a performance. It is almost as if a footballer devoted as much time and energy to making pseudo-gladiatorial gestures after scoring a goal as he did to laying on the pass, running on to the return and powering it past the helpless keeper. The 'ritualistic' device most commonly exploited is the mask, first employed in this context by Jack Curley, a celebrated American promoter, in 1915. In an attempt to draw crowds he paid a small time fighter Mort Henderson to appear hooded. The condition under which Henderson and most of his successors have appeared is that they should remove the mask if defeated. Out of bloodymindedness and curiosity the crowd is generally behind the unmasked contestant – the mask, which frequently hides a well known wrestler, is a sign of cunning and deceit, of the unknown and potentially dangerous; while it would be foolish to espy great significance in an audience's collective fear of the man behind the mask it seems impossible not to believe that the audience does seek in wrestling a kind of reassurance, an affirmation of a moral order which it sees disintegrating in the world outside the ring.

1972

Warring Camps: Messrs Harty and Bogarde

Russell Harty versus Dirk Bogarde was a good memorable match, if a bit one sided. When these bachelors get going the going can get rough. Russell can get rough too. We all know that he can, if pressed, become a bit rude, a bit tactless, a bit prurient, a bit gauche, a bit coarse. But it took Dirk to show him up as rough. Beside Dirk, who is as smooth as the virgin oil pressed from the olives that grow in groves around the Provençal *mas* where he practises the art of living in France, Russell appears like Vaseline with grit in it.

Russell wanted to call Dirk 'Dirk' and wanted Dirk to call him 'Russell'. But Russell didn't have the nerve, was evidently fazed by Dirk's hauteur and so addressed him by no name. And Dirk disobligingly called Russell 'Mister Harty' – a mode of appellation that is most certainly not significant of respect in tellyland – a couple of weeks ago we had Max Hastings calling the GLC Führer 'Mr Livingstone' while Ken (who suffers the delusion that people find him charming) tried to charm his interrogator by matily calling him 'Max'. Matiness didn't work with Dirk who despite his 60 years (you'd never have guessed – how does he do it?) still packs a mean lisp: 'If I can take the Rank Organization for 17 years I can take you for five minutes . . . Oh we're doing anecdotes are we . . . Losing my temper is pretty good. Cataclysmic. Like Krakatoa. Do you know what that is? Yes you would you were a teacher.' And so on.

Russell fell back on the old standby that has seen him through many a scrape. A little bit of brown nose in the night. 'You're not a bad little drawer are you,' he said. Dirk was immune to such tired gambits and decided to pull rank.

In the very wonderful hierarchy of showbiz a fully fledged film star who is also a novelist is on Everest while a chat show 'host' is somewhere on the foothills without a sherpa. He also decided to be really cruel and to flash his familial credentials – father was on *The Times* (a journalist, ducky, not one of those nasty sogats) and there were some Dutch burgomasters whose village Dirk relieved single-handed in 1945. This put Russell in an awkward position because:

a) He was never a war hero. He spent his National Service as a principal boy with an ENSA concert party.

b) He has no background. Like John Worthing Russell was found. He was found by Fred Harty, a Blackburn greengrocer, in a consignment of apples and so might have originated who knows where – Todmorden, Cleckheaton, Heckmondwyke. The possibilities are infinite. Fred and Mrs Fred were kindly souls and instead of chucking out their *objet trouvé* they nestled and nurtured the drab apple till it turned into the exquisite fruit we know and love today – bruised, maybe, but not bowed by Bogarde.

1981

Pier's End: The Finest In Traditional Variety

'Come to Cromer and catch the crabs!' No, no, it's not quite that sort of show. Tired old puns may be in order, but not tired old puns of that sort: the pubic louse, Phthirius Inguinalis, has no place in a comic's repertoire here. This is a family show in a family resort. In this context 'family' has a peculiar meaning, it signifies oldsters (who grew up in a milder comic climate than that which prevails today) and the prepubescent (who, supposedly, have yet to learn to understand blue gags). Such gags would not simply offend the audience, one gets the initial impression that they would be fallacious too. Cromer is not full of packs of louts preying on packs of giggling bimbos, or vice versa; it is not a town which like, say, Brighton is a byword for sexual indiscrimination; it is not a town you go home from with a tiresome itch.

What there is to be found at Cromer: bucket and spades; a sea too cold to swim in and the colour of luminous mud; a bracing breeze (i.e. a wind that reaches the core of your bones); fish and chips; coconut ice in every shade of the food dyer's spectrum; guest-houses threequarters empty; a grand hotel that has seen better days, and before those even better ones; front-room shops selling crabs, the edible kind; window displays that are symphonies in Crimplene; holiday-makers from the East Midlands carrying buckets of Napisan big enough for an orphanage; OAPs of every shape and size and affliction; mottled skin distended across cellulitic silt; proletarian customers, strangers to even unambitiously pretentious menus, treated with genteel martinetry by lower-middle-class matrons who know they're really too grand to be running tea-shops-cum-restaurants; little girls in J-cloth thin frocks full of

the wind running hand in hand down the zig-zag path to the front, screeching twangy complaints about the cold to their parents below – they're a tawdry post welfare state parody of a tableau on a railway poster of long ago, all crisp cottons and poppies and smiles and sun forever more. Of course life was never like railway posters, any more than it was like the work of the over-rated vulgarian Donald McGill, but the children whose contemporaries were idealized in those posters are here; their laps are covered in every tartan that ever was and others that the Japanese have invented, some have put so far between them and the children they were that they can't walk, have to be wheeled. The show is aspirantly appropriate to the town. It, too, is anachronistic, or, rather, it's a self-conscious re-creation of an age which – with showbiz indulgence – is made to stretch from the turn of the century to the mass death of the music halls and variety theatres in the fifties. But while the town wears a defeated face the show troupes on, puts on a brave front, dissembles all with DIY glitter and abundant graft.

In the place's only bookshop (which specializes in skeins of knitting nylon and souvenir plates) I was dismayed to find a remaindered copy of a book of mine; I had hoped they were beyond embarrassment's range in Darwin. I took it out on a septuagenarian on the other side of the shop. He was gaping at an impractically dressed, practically undressed girl in a magazine from the top shelf. I thought: You're too old for adult reading. I said: 'Will you be going to see the end of pier show?' He looked at me with no astonishment and replied: 'Shouldn't think so.' And he returned his eyes to the girl who, of course, wanted to be a dancer or actress but failed and fell and ended up submitting herself to the gynaecological scrutiny of strangers. It's easy to go that way. It's a hard life. You need more than talent. You need the breaks. Getting to the top's not the thing, it's staying there. The accepted wisdom of showbiz doesn't change. The accepted wisdom of showbiz comes fully formed in a package with your first Equity ticket; the youngest members of Seaside Special's cast, the three teenaged dancers, persistently echo their elders. They are

steeped in a tradition they hardly know at first hand. They already subscribe to the home-made stoicism that is necessarily habitual in this life. They already have their personal (mini-) histories of lousy managements, dodgy contracts, wretched conditions and of artistes they've worked with they really admire, places like Thailand where 'we were treated like royalty because of the colour of our skin.' They know about digs and theatrical landladies even though they're of the past (secondary victims of theatre closures), even though they themselves are living in a furnished flat so quintessentially seedy it might be a naturalistic set. The paint is peeling and the backs of the chairs have suffered badly from the passing of the fashion for anti-macassars. There are personal touches: a copy of *Hair* magazine, posters of dancers, Mills and Boon books ('They're great,' says Michelle, 'you can read them in an hour. You know what's going to happen.') Beside Michelle's bed is a framed photo of her boyfriend Martin. He's a disc-jockey and owns a record shop and devotedly flew to Japan to see her when she was dancing in hotels there. Christina has two fun-fur doggies on her counterpane and an album full of snaps of her season at Great Yarmouth; she exhibits the album with the sort of pride associable with duelling scars or sporting trophies. Michelle's twin Jacqui is 'the dominant one'. She is also the one who changed her name; she began rehearsals as Jacqui and was Jaynee by the first night. 'Michelle fractured her spine in the show in Singapore,' she says to explain their possession of a jar of Tiger Balm. The twins are buying their parents' council house in Benfleet. Here they're on Equity minimum and a subsistence allowance. 'But then,' says Christine, 'they don't charge much at the box office.' You feel that they'd work for nothing; they evidently consider themselves lucky to have got these jobs. Sixty girls were auditioned and it's the other fifty-seven who are just now more likely to be photographed for *Knave*.

The choice of hotels, for those who still come here, has been rather truncated these past two decades. Of the three sumptuous and fantastical hotels in the neo-Chambord manner by the Norwich architect Skipper only the Hôtel de Paris remains.

The Grand and the Metropole have burned down, so have three other big hotels. Still, says a wag called Scott, we've got enough left for another twenty years of fires, unless business gets *really* bad. Cromer's moment is marked by its architecture. Lutyens built a chapel and two houses at Overstrand. One of them, The Pleasaunce, may have a wimpish name but it is an hallucinatory tour de force. Two other Arts and Crafts masters built nearby: Edward Prior at Holt and Detmar Blow at Happisburgh. Some roads in the town are anthologies of late Victorian and Edwardian taste. Edward VII used to come here from Sandringham. There were four theatres. Now there is no choice at all, and the possibility of future choice is obviated by the current demolition of the former Olympia Music Hall. The pier theatre, the Pavilion, survives because the council knows that it is just about the last remaining attraction and essential to the town's economy; small businesses including those owned by councillors would go to the wall without it. So North Norfolk District Council is spending £49 thousand on the show, £8 thousand on publicity for it, and a further undisclosed sum on the services as producer of Mr Richard Condon of the Theatre Royal,Norwich. Well, Theatre Royal, Norwich and Gaiety Theatre, Dublin. He was recently a member of a group which lost in its bid for the local radio franchise and has since put what we must call his boundless enthusiasm into a project to refurbish a variety theatre in his native city. I guess he would call it boundless enthusiasm too. He is a prolix man with no discernible gift for understatement. He has the pale lashes and brows of a former redhead and used to be an actor. His sentiments tend to kinship with those of 'There's No Business Like Show Business': 'Our pound of flesh comes not in a wage packet but in the applause. Producers are artists at heart – there's no less pride in our hearts when we stand at the back of a darkened theatre and hear the applause than in those of the artists . . . In Life there are winners and losers – we in show business may lose but in the end we're the winners because we're the givers and when a season comes to an end it's an anti-climax because another session of giving has come to an end . . . You don't want it to

rain when people are leaving a theatre, you don't want to see them soaked because they've been your guests, like guests in your own house . . .' Mr Condon says all this and much more to the accompaniment of *Elizabethan Serenade* from the speakers in his theatre's restaurant where he entertained me to lunch, or, rather, to a third of lunch – he had guests at two other tables too, and flitted purposefully between us. For all his grandiosity and mock-lyrical bluster he's a shrewd mover; if the end of the pier show goes how will future generations learn about this shard of British culture? Where will tomorrow's entertainers learn their trade? Mr Condon is not merely a showman, he's in the business of education too. He wants the best for his shows and I think, given his limited resources, he comes near getting it. There's not an Archie Rice in sight, though last year the male half of the singing duo couldn't hit a note in tune and was sacked at the dress rehearsal. He turned out to be the girl's manager and had been hired unseen, unheard. This opportunistic duo was clearly the exception to Mr Condon's rule that he personally audition every act that does not come with the approval of the director; Mr Condon does not go by the small – and sometimes sadly desperate – advertisements in the back of *The Stage*, so he says. Actually, he has no need to. This is a contracting world whose inhabitants tend to know each other.

'I knew Julian when he was sixteen, and the drummer at Folkestone,' says Bob Marlowe, the toupeed director who was formerly in the Folies Bergère. Now Julian is twenty five and one half of Diane and Julian, this year's singing duo. Julian and Diane are married and he oozes uxorious pride while he accompanies her on guitar or bagpipes or trombone and she looks pert in return. They sing 'In The Mood', 'Chattanooga Choo Choo' (both with fancy dress routine) and 'Amazing Grace' (standing still to show respect). They live in Trowbridge but they really live in their Fairholme New Dawn decorated with prints of steam engines. It is a formidably tidy caravan, every Ex-O-Teak surface is squeaky clean and the floor is fitted with shortbread-beige carpet of modest pile – 'I went and got a 12 by 5 remnant,' says Diane. Spruceness is a

preoccupation of theirs: their rehearsal mufti is aggressively ironed; Diane's Big Hair always looks just rollered; Julian's long-short entertainer coif with special flaps over the ears always looks just trimmed; their stage outfits, the work of a Liverpudlian lady with a day-glo imagination, always look brand new. This can be a problem, I mean keeping costumes looking that way. The rest of the cast turns to Diane and Julian for advice on such matters. While Des King, the magician, is making one of his many quick, velcro-aided changes in the wings on the fourth night he is also asking Diane how long he can go on wearing the same shirt. 'What's it made of?' 'It's nylon, I think,' replies Des. 'Well, get it done quick then,' says Diane, as Bob Marlowe squeezes past in a tense pet to find out why the stage crew has failed to pull out the flat iron from the previous routine and as the audience fails to respond to one of the show's unfunnier gags: 'What's black with white spots?' 'Birmingham!' The audience likes the next one: 'How do elephants swim in the nude?' 'They take off their trunks!' And it also likes the finale, the fourth production number of the evening.

All the cast participates in these elaborately choreographed manoeuvres. This causes some problems for those who aren't dancers. Des and Julian are to hoofing what Mr Nigel Lawson is to humility. Still, everyone rallies round; the dancers help out and of course Diane, who was a dancer before she was a singer, tutors Julian beneath the birches at the Six Acres Caravan Park, Roughton. But not everyone's happy. Mr Gordon Simmons, the pier manager, thinks the finale is insufficiently climactic: 'The girls look like nuns in those dresses.' He prefers the girls to look as they do in the opening number – like polychromatic hearse horses with feathery spikes vertical from their heads supporting transparent banners that hang behind them. They do look undeniably sexy, just as they do in a subsequent number where they wear school-of-Cabaret costumes and aspirate the Abba song 'Money'. This is what Mr Simmons goes for and what he thinks Bob Marlowe should have gone for. And he speaks from knowledge of the business. He used to be a publicist with

the Rank Organization and was 'in the cabaret business with my friend Terry Chappelle the organist/entertainer, you know. Terry used to be one of the best known drag artistes in East Anglia.' He's also not happy that the Council no longer allows him to open the bar at lunchtime. Terry used to play the organ and the takings were good – presumably not good enough to meet the wages of the staff involved. The Council has also declined to meet the overtime demands of the pier's amusement arcade staff, so the place shuts early, leaving only the fairy lights lit.

This is what George and Ena Wilson appreciate: 'You leave the show and there are all the coloured lights and you're walking across that bit of water . . .' 'And there's the breeze, girl,' says George. 'Yes, and the waves breaking, it's oh . . . it's the end of the pier.' They've seen every show here since 1937. George first came to Cromer on holiday in 1912 – sepia photo of beach, sailor suits, his pretty mother, the thriving pier – and brought Ena here for their honeymoon. They bought a holiday cottage just after the war and retired to the town in the sixties. George says: 'There's so much that's being lost or has gone. We should maintain the pier, live theatre. Shakespeare knew about that. Have you ever come across Dorothy Wayne? A Yorkshire lass. She whistles classics. Mozart. I've never known a woman whistle like that. She's at Clacton this year.' Miss Wayne is only one of the many stars whom George and Ena have entertained. In 1953 there were Clive Dunn and Ronnie Corbett who 'was only funny because he was so short.' They met Felix Bowness who's in *Hi De Hi*, and Neville Kennard, and Clifford Henry. And lots of others whose names they've forgotten. 'Cromer,' says George, 'owes a lot to Dick Condon – he's brought the show back to pre-war standards' – which is his cue to rummage on shelves beneath a parade of horse brasses and produce the programme of *Out of The Blue*, the 1938 show produced by the husband and wife team of Dickie Pounds and Ronald Brandon, dearest seat three shillings. 'They did seven different shows during the season then and the house was always full.'

They do two shows now, in weekly repertory, and the night

I watched the first one there were about 140 punters, herded together on the seats closest to the central aisle. Although more than 250 thousand people visit the pier each year local support for the show is declining. Mr Peter Dawson who believes that the Lord led him to Cromer to open the Tudor Christian Guest House (no smoking, no alcohol, prayers at 8.45, grace at meals) thinks that most of his customers would prefer to go to 'something at the church' and won't be seeing the show himself. A lady, one of a dozen dressed in the cream uniform of the Norfolk Women's Bowling Association, told me that she'd be 'missing nothing' if she forwent the show. An hotel barman said the same: 'I'd sooner watch the telly. Besides, when am I going to get there? I've been on for fourteen days on the trot. We can't get the staff. We've got a standing advert for staff in the paper and we still can't get the staff.' So despite the ubiquitous publicity posters and the enthusiastic notices in the local press and the tireless PR efforts of the cast – opening fêtes, a sacrificial chorus girl thrown in the drink on Lifeboat Day – half empty houses are the norm. One of the problems is that the bill includes no 'name acts' like at, say, Yarmouth; though even these are no guarantee of good business. 'They put Danny La Rue into Yarmouth a couple of years ago and he closed a week early. They must have been mad to put him in – there are no poofs in Yarmouth, it's still cloth caps and mufflers.' This is Gordon Jay speaking. He and his younger brother Bunny are described in the publicity for the show as 'blood brothers' which is Richard Condon's way of saying that they share the same parents, have not assumed fraternity as a showbiz convenience. Heaven knows why real brothers should be considered a bigger draw than sham ones – maybe it has something to do with 'sincerity'. They certainly make a polished pair, and are easily as good as any of the current crop of television double acts; they are living, joking, hoofing proof that it *does* take more than talent. Perhaps Bunny's claim that they 'never wanted to be stars' has an element of necessary truth in it, they may have recognized in themselves long ago a want of ambition, of single-mindedness, of the killer instinct. Their

career has coincided precisely with the rapid diminution in the number of theatres that provided their livelihood. They suffix their recollections with 'that one's gone too'. They suffix their recollections of the people they've played alongside the same way: 'Tommy Cooper, Eric . . . all the funny ones have gone.' They do seaside shows in the summer, panto at Christmas, cruises, clubs, cabaret. They were learning their lines for a pantomime the day that John Kennedy was murdered and were playing an American base the day his brother was murdered. At a club near Keighley they thought they'd died a death but the manager told them they'd gone down better than any act in years, that the audience's silence indicated approval, that usually there were crates full of bottles to be gathered from the stage after a performance. They've done shows in discos 'full of fellows mauling tarts'. They have two children each, don't mind if people think they're 'tootsie', live two hundred miles from each other – 'we'd go mad otherwise.' Gordon wanders about backstage wearing nothing but a jockstrap. Bunny used to own a tobacconist cum newsagent shop in Harrow. Bunny says: 'I can't think of any *big* name I've worked with who was a khazi . . . it's the ones on the way down . . .' Gordon says: 'I love the Queen Mum. She likes a tipple. *And* she smokes. Oh yes I love her.' In Bunny's sitting room on the top floor of a 'private' hotel Gordon tuts over the Equity Journal's long list of managements with whom it is inadvisable to enter into a contract, and he sighs.

On Sundays there's no rest. Des King packs his quilted, cocktail bar style magic box and heads off to a gig at King's Lynn. Diane and Julian race to Southport, where they'll stay with Diane's parents and play at a friend's club. Freda Farnworth, soprano, goes home to Harpenden to cook her husband a 'proper meal'. Graham Trew, who rather incongruously combines summer shows with recording songs to settings by Bax, Ireland, Vaughan Williams etc. drives to London to sing in the choir of the Chapel Royal, St James's Palace. Bob Marlowe says that he spends the day worrying. Worrying no doubt about whether he'll be back next year: 'It's frightening the way the council has economized. There used always to be

a ballet number in a scene [pron. shaynah = show] like this, now they won't give us the money for all the point shoes that you go through in a season.' Gordon Simmons prepares the theatre for that night's Celebrity Concert – the acts are mostly refugees from the hit parade of twenty years ago: Acker Bilk, The Bachelors (aka The New Bachelors), Frank Ifield. On two Sundays there is Tammy Jones. This double booking is explained by the fact that she lives nearby. In town tired rheumatic limbs haul themselves on to coaches to Holkham Hall and Blakeney and the Norfolk Shire Horse Centre. Families sit down to execrable lunches, then walk them off on the pier. Demand for tickets at the box office isn't brisk. A lad fishing for 'anything' from the pier tells me that last winter's murder here, when a general store owner was beaten to death, was not simply robbery: 'Everyone knew he'd been letting ladies off their bills for a spot of the other. Jealous husband . . .' The breaking sea leaves a scum on the beach like that round the top of a milkshake glass. An overweight couple gape at a poster for the show and he says to her: 'Nah, never 'eard of any of em!' Maybe it doesn't matter. Maybe the show should no more be required to perform profitably than, say, a library or park. When Mr Richard Condon says that he believes that such shows have had their day you can take it that he means they haven't had their day if he is given a bigger budget and a fatter fee next year.

1984

Fistic: In The Ring With Ms Oates

The unqualified title indicates the extent of Miss Oates's fistic chauvinism. This book is notes towards a draft of a meditative essay on the *American* sport or game or bestial commerce. The ascription of 'universality' – always a dodgy notion – to the only boxing that the author knows, American boxing, is presumptuous and doesn't hold up. Sure, a guy trying to put his opponent's nose through his brain in Tulsa or Des Moines has a kinship with the artist who's at it in Daventry or Toul, but it's a faint kinship for the Englishman and the Frenchman are not performing a rite that is central to the society they want to ascend; they are doing something that is peripheral, sectarian.

But in America boxing is mainstream; it's where the greatest champions come from and that's where the greatest boxing writing comes from – it has prompted a literature which is as idiosyncratic and as unwittingly parochial as English stuff on cricket and, doubtless, Belgian stuff on cycling, Spanish stuff on tauromachy. The best known if not the best American stuff on the latter, Hemingway's, was deprecated by Nabokov as 'bells, bulls, balls': the lesson there is that Americans should stick to the sports they're born to. What Norman Mailer, say, so brilliantly responds to in boxing is its grandiose primitiveness, its *appearance* of elemental struggle, its Americanness. The English, infamously shy of big themes, treat boxing with sociological tact – compare Leon Griffiths's *Dinner At The Sporting Club* with something like Scorsese's *Raging Bull*: the English film is a good one but does not even essay the tragic, it knows its place (like many English boxers), it shuns the *bigness* of the subject in favour of local colour, it does not want

to risk accusations of pretentiousness. Miss Oates doesn't allow herself to be inhibited by such misgivings – if an idea comes to her she whacks it in; she has no thesis, she hardly has a programme. This is a book written with the intention of discovering why it should be written, what we are made privy to is Miss Oates's investigation of her unlikely preoccupation, its causes and its pull on her. Just as her bathetic notions are countered by pretty acute ones so is her self-analysis tempered by a sort of sexual neutrality – the one thing she is not particularly eager to resolve is why *as a woman*, necessarily wanting the opportunity to 'identify' with this or that fighter, the blue or the red, she should be so zealous an amateur.

Maybe this question of gender is not pertinent; maybe the real divide is between boxers and non-boxers irrespective of whether the latter be m. or f. This divide seems fundamental to the understanding of boxing and Miss Oates properly returns to it, and again. The point she argues is that boxing is not a metaphor for anything else because boxers are willing to be hurt, will continue fighting even when unconscious on their feet. They are programmed not to give up: they would fight to the death were it not for the intervention of a second or referee. And when one vastly muscled man slumps as though stripped of his motor skills it recalls a beast injured in a mortal struggle, it does not recall anything human. It is in the transcendence of pain and the inability to surrender that boxers are different; pride vanquishes the instinct for survival. Fighters are not murdered; a death in the ring or, more likely, in hospital five days later (a hospital the fighter never sees) is a sort of suicide. Thus if boxing is a model for anything it is for arcane exercises in masochism where death may be the price for the successful pursuit of terminal pleasure, it may be that pleasure itself: it may be that those who go looking for a little death will get a big one instead.

It is the *possibility* of witnessing a terrible injury or worse – the crowd is baying 'Kill 'im, kill 'im' – that lifts boxing, especially big time boxing, from being merely a cosy homo-erotic spectacle into a teratological one: boxers are as freakish as sideshow mutants. The fact that a boxer has made his body

strong, while a wretched creature born with auxiliary limbs is liable to be weak, makes no difference – what whets our appetites is the *otherness* of boxing, the way men make themselves into monsters in order to be able to do it, the way the whole show scorns nature and turns that old mother inside out. Miss Oates gets to the core of this appeal often enough even if she is a mite reticent in admitting that what she has so eloquently written on is the backdoor union of porn and brawn.

On Boxing by Joyce Carol Oates

1987

Veal Market: Child Stars

One is on notoriously dodgy ground with child entertainers. Unless you make it clear that they are charming, 'cute', adorable, talented etcetera their parents (who naturally have nothing but the little dears' best interests at heart) will dump a truckful of writs on you and accuse you of being the sort of beast who causes a lovable unaffected 10 year old Shirley Bassey impersonatrix to suffer massive mental torment. So words like 'kiddieporn', 'lewd dwarf', 'jailbait', 'petite grue' and so on will not be found here. One of the greatest judicial miscarriages of this century occurred in the 30s when Graham Greene who had made some mildly deprecatory remarks about the infant vedette of the moment, Shirley Temple, was sued for libel by a morally indignant film company and the Temple parents. Greene lost; the conjunction of Hollywood might and English legal crassness was evidently one to be reckoned with. I wonder if the peripatetic novelist and the eager Republican ambassador have ever met and, if they have, what they said to each other. Since Mrs Temple Black is still alive I cannot repeat what Greene *did* say then, all those years ago. I merely wish that (were I allowed to print them) I could find words half as good as Greene's to describe the delightful little kiddies who appear in *High Hopes*.

This is a film about child entertainers which exerts a fascination like that of a blackhead or a secret scalp scab that one scratches in private. I suspect that the director intended no such thing. He is a man called Jonathan Gili who is not notably paedophobic; however, his good intentions have been thwarted by the nature of his subjects, delightful and talented and wonderful though they be. The thing about these children

is not that they are like midget grown-ups, adults before their time (poor bairns) but that they are parodies of children. I don't believe for a moment that children are innocent, unknowing. But that doesn't make the *institutionalization* of natural childish preoccupations like make-believe any less objectionable. Exploitation? Well, no.

Or if it is a question of exploitation then the exploited are witting parties to the contract – these lovely little mites actually *want* to be what their parents want them to be. Maybe they are like they are because they have *learned* pushiness from their parents; or maybe in the great hereditary stakes the genes marked 'pushiness' and 'opportunism' do what you'd expect and shove their way to the front like a toothless old biddy in a bus queue. It is clear that children have as great a capacity for vulgarity and tawdry ambition ('wanna go on stage with Sinatra cos he's so professional') as their elders and in order to fulfil that ambition they have to dissemble childishness and become monsters of a sort (monster comes from *monstrare*; it is a monster's lot to be shown or displayed).

Of course the adults that children take as models are their parents or dreadful showbiz types. The parents shown in this film include a couple of Cobham achievers who met at an amateur operatic society (or dramatic society, they forget which); a lady from Leeds who was too scared to attend auditions when she was a teenager; and Mrs Cook of Margate. She is a most startling person who, had she not existed, no one would have thought of inventing. Impossible to tell where she comes from: Greece? Impossible to tell what kind of showbiz she was in during her salad days. Doubtless more Doner Kebab House than White Tower, if you see what I mean. Impossible furthermore not to be impressed by the tinned salmon pink chiffon creation that she wears and the coils of butter colour hair piled on her crown. Her lovely children are called the Seaview Singers after the guest house that she owns. They have made a record.

'We a send to a Quin Motha. We a gotta nice reply. We a send to President Reagan. We a sorry he got shot.' Her lovely children take the stage dressed as animals: 'When you see a

the children dressing up in cat and dog it's a beautiful. Like a motha I am proud.' Like a prouda motha she was not impressed by the auditions for the all kiddie musical *Annie,* too much waiting around in the cold. It was at this veal market that Mr Gili appears to have done much of his recruiting. Brave fellow. Ten minutes in that room with hundreds of yelping hopefuls presided over by an avuncular American would have sent a lesser man like myself scurrying to his W C Fields shrine.

1981

Jones The Chat (né Jones The Voice)

Every generation has its Jones – the one that's the model to ape, the one that's to be kept up with. Aled's father's generation's Jones was Lewis Brian: b.1942, d.1969; post-mortally discovered in possession of a liver two and a half times the size that is apt and usual in a man of twenty-six years; convictions for urinating in public and for possession of cannabis and cocaine; half a dozen or more children by different chicks; a Rolling Stone; trouble. Aled's generation's Jones is Aled. There has been an almighty shift. Sure, there is as much bad behaviour among the young now as there was then – it is an adolescent constant. The shift is in *the ideal* of youthful mores: it is manifest in the tolerance that bad behaviour is accorded by the vast army of 'ordinary' young people; it is manifest in their desire to emulate bad behaviour. And the facts are that they are intolerant and have little desire.

HTV's decision to promote the quondam boy treble as a fully paid-up 'personality' and thus as a kiddy role-model is nothing if not canny. It is founded in the astute realization that there is a ready audience for a teen hero who is essentially boy-next-doorish – wholesome, decent, uncomplicated, on the rails and so normal it's almost abnormal. Of course there's little that's normal about a boy – and he is a boy – of seventeen who has sold many million records, has the pecuniary rewards and record industry icons (one platinum disc, five gold, five silver) that go with shifting so many units, has had the entire nation – well, the entire tabloid end of it – worrying about his voice's strange unwillingness to 'break'. But he is normal if you take normalcy in the young as being that state which pertained before the young herded themselves into the ghetto

of youth culture, there to worship false gods with livers like those of Périgourdin geese.

On a mid-sixties telly show specifically for the ghetto dwellers, 'Whole Scene Going', you'd get the 'articulate' guitarist, Pete Townshend, proselytizing on behalf of drugs: 'Everyone should take drugs, like.' On Aled Jones's 'Chatterbox' the propaganda is of course directed to the contrary end, its message is that if you don't want to end up like Pete Townshend you'd better stay clean. The propagandist is one Michael Hurley, a former glue sniffer who is now a professional former glue sniffer, an old hand at warning of the dangers of his abandoned hobby; he is an exact coeval of Aled, seventeen years old, but seems vastly older; he employs the same nerveless jargon as do crims who've learnt sociology in the nick. He is Chairperson of the National Association of Young People In Care, the winner of something called a British Youth Award, is on the committee of the Royal Jubilee and Prince's Trust, lectures senior police officers on 'solvent abuse', smokes (but guiltily), is involved in setting up a cheap café which will offer shelter and solace to runaways at – he hopes – Euston or King's Cross. His big beef is that glue need not be spirit based, that water based glues are as efficacious for everything but sniffing – 'I've talked to Evostik. I've told them . . .' He tells me that he's told them in a room which contains more orange squash than I've ever seen: several four-litre bottles of the neat stuff and about a hundred plastic cupsful (dilute). Just here are piles of satchels and 8–14 year old coats, just here is a monitor TV screen showing the kiddy-packed studio a few yards away, just here is the bright, primary-school, primary colour scheme that HTV's architects went for when they po-mo'd the premises. (Architect jargon for *to post-modernize.*) The entire place looks as though it has recently been rethought by and for children – or, which is not the same thing, by adults who think they know what children want. They think they know what children want because, sartorially at any rate, they are stuck in childhood: jolly patterned pullovers; trousers in colours associable with buckets and spades; kickers, trainers, tennis shoes, sneakers. If

anyone knows how to tie a tie he's not owning up to it. The show's director, Ken Price, may have half a cwt of Rolex round his wrist and he may have grey hair – but it's coiffed into a tempered Rod Stewart, spiky without suggesting a capacity for GBH; it is unquestionably a *young* haircut. His treatment of the children who act in the show's covertly didactic sketches is admirable. He is patient, amused, open and talks to them as though he has never considered the possibility of the existence of a cultural-generational gap between them. The children, from HTV's enterprising drama workshop are bright, articulate, self possessed; one of them, James Hyden – '*Not* like the composer' – is clearly an actor of real promise. But he's not big-headed, and nor is Aled. There is no child here to whom might be applied the celebrated child-star epithet of 'lewd dwarf'. This is not a freak-show. And the prevalent ambience is that of unforced friendliness. It all seems too good, too nice, too cosy, too homely, too uncontaminated by the ways of this world to be true. The cocoon is disturbingly chaste. We must step outside.

Decay, mortality, evil: we step outside and The Other Things are loitering, lurking importunately. They're there to lend this article Balance. *Decay*: the road east from central Bristol towards HTV passes beneath the suburb of Totterdown which is dizzily suspended from the drizzly sky in defiance of the usual laws. The name hints at its vertiginous chaos, at the way the topsy-turvy terraces tumble widdershins down this cliff, roller-coast up that one, at the way buildings stop on the very brink when the madcap who laid it all out was persuaded that air is no foundation. But the name doesn't hint at the dereliction, the windows opaque with grime, the chipped faïence, the blankets for curtains, the shantiness of it, the spaces where houses were, where dogs procreate and plastic bags are propelled on the wind like lightweight gulls. *Mortality*: HTV is situated bang next door to one of the finest cemeteries of the Golden Age, i.e. 1820–40. When you're dead it doubtless doesn't matter whether your mausoleum is gothic or Greek, but the living are surely better dissuaded of their delusions of immortality by the latter: the columnar style has

a gravity and a sublimity which are awesome. It is that style which abounds here, among weeping ashes and cypresses. *Evil*: if a building can embody evil – and it's at best a questionable notion – then Arnos Castle, less than a hundred yards the other way, is one that does. Its sobriquet, The Devil's Cathedral is fitting. It is Georgian gothick, on the large side, and would be unexceptionable were it not for the inky, slaty lumps of smelting slag of which it was built. It is near-black and possesses a petroleum sheen. It first gave me nightmares when I was about eleven years old.

All this emotionally charged inanimation which so potently colours a half mile of east Bristol in a harrowing arterial serial is shut out by HTV's strivingly cheery portals and is doggedly eschewed by 'Chatterbox'. Maybe children's and young teenagers' shows should deal in temporal optimism, in kiddy-friendly correctiveness; but they have taken the place of church and, like it or not, they thus have some *duty* to instil ideas of might, awe and the fear of god (or God): you can't be a good atheist till you've been a Christian or Moslem or whatever. I'm not sure that there's enough in 'Chatterbox' to kick against, its ethos is Chapel – hardly astonishing when you consider that the show's begetter, Peter Murphy, is Welsh, like its presenter. Mr Murphy is plump but not Elvis-plump (there's a man who stayed with God and look what happened to him); he is friendly rather than professionally friendly; he is also the begetter of HTV's (and Central Television's) drama workshops for children – set-ups which narrow the gulf between TV stations and the regions they serve.

Children born in the last decade and a half should be signally grateful to people like Mr Murphy. His workshops in Nottingham, Birmingham, Cardiff and Bristol fulfil utilities local authorities can no longer afford. 'Chatterbox' is their spin-off. It is the public ideal of the 'alternative' end of the seventies, realized late in the day. It addresses 'ishoos' – as Bristol's most celebrated ex-MP, Toniben, would put it – such as truancy, smoking, bullying. James Hyden and his near-coevals act out sketches whose purpose is to show how low these are.

'Chatterbox''s godparents are St Geldof and Esther Rantzen. It trades in institutionalized niceness, in being goody-goody. It belongs more to the world of professional telly-kiddiedom than it does to that of childhood unmediated by telly. It knows that it's reliant on the public perception of Aled's purity, necessary chastity. The Duke of Edinburgh probably thought he'd got it right when he said to Aled, the treble: 'You haven't much of a future have you?' He was wrong. The voice went on and on, pubescence didn't show – which was darned lucky for all concerned. Now that the voice has 'slipped', as Aled puts it, things still look rosy.

Aled's voice was said – by cliché-mongers from the *Mail* and from the *Daily Telegraph* – to be like that of an 'angel'. Voice and owner inevitably get confused; now that the voice is no more the teen-angel has to develop a new gamut of skills. Obviously he has a head start over his fellow presenters, Michael Quill and Josie White, in that he is already a middle-brow folk-hero. He has cardigan-cred, granny appeal – whether this will endure as he ages is questionable. Child stars have not always found the transition that easy. Nor have their fans found it easy. Will the ladies in the canteen at HTV still be treating Aled to cans of Coca Cola when he's twenty? Looks will obviously play a large part in determining whether Jones the Voice will succeed as Jones the Chat. His appearance just now is rather akin to what you'd get if you crossed Michael Heseltine with Lord Tonypandy. His manner, when he's performing, is pert, chirpy, a bit on the cute side. He claims that his model is Wogan but has yet to learn how to do the self-aggrandizing self-deprecation that our Tel is an adept of. There are other ambitions he harbours – to read music at Cambridge, to act in a West End musical. When he talks of these it is with the same day-dreaminess that any teenager might evince when discussing the possibilities that the world offers. The difference with Aled is that the possibilities are probabilities; his name unlocks doors. Like it or not he is apart from his contemporaries. He inhabits two parallel worlds – that of school and home in Anglesey and that of all this (TV, records, gala performances, private gigs for the Prince and

Princess of Wales). He has the nous to keep the two separate, compartmentalized. Though the fact that they aren't quite watertight is revealed in a rather odd way. He discusses the questions he is going to ask his guests (Jason Connery, a cluster of teenage actors from the series 'Grange Hill' and 'Brookside') with the show's researcher Martin Lamb. The questions stay well this side of the eccentric, indeed they tend towards the predictable. Then Aled announces that he wants to ask the teenage actors 'whether they get bullied in school because they're famous'. Now, this is a matter that is hardly likely to be of much moment to the audience; it suggests that Aled may be seeking to find someone in the same peculiar boat that he's in. He claims not to be bullied, but he does admit that he 'gets hassled'. There cannot be many seventeen year old males who require a chaperone; Aled's father, Derek, travels with him. They share a hotel room 'for economy', they share a fear of places such as Crewe Station where, like everyone else, they have to wait and which they think might be a site of trouble were Aled alone. 'He's more like a mate really,' says Derek Jones of his prodigious son. Aled says much the same. Aled's success, wealth and fame have altered the usual father-son balance. The two present a solid front; it is most unlike the characteristic child-parent relationship of the last generation, there is a closeness and a commonness of goals – just the things that 'Chatterbox' wants to foster.

Indeed, watching this unusual father and son together you begin to believe that, after all, the 'new niceness' is not just something got up by hectoring alternative philanthropists. You begin to believe that it may have some root in actuality. But then the floor manager starts to act like a martinet. And another technician says of Datsuns: 'Paki-taxis – that's all they're good for.' And the parent of one of the show's guests starts cursing. Same old world.

1988

Unspeakable, Uneatable, Unreadable: Blackwood Goes Hunting

Caroline Blackwood's attitude towards hunting is one of extreme equivocation. Which is just dandy, perfectly understandable and altogether sane: most of us are, I suspect, as bored by the unspeakable as we are by their antagonists whom Blackwood insists on referring to as 'anti's' – that genitive apostrophe is presumably thrown in in an access of solidarity with ordinary illiterates who aren't writers. The trouble – if you can put it so mildly – is that Blackwood *is* a writer and she is grossly handicapped by this equivocation which is, as I say, normal enough but absolutely not a position from which to begin an enquiry into a subject that arouses in a minority such fierce feelings. It is as if she had wittingly set out to advertise her adherence to what broadcasters used to call 'balance'. Thus for every vulpicidal psychopath like the late Duke of Beaufort she displays a vegan psychopath with murderous inclinations towards huntsmen. She weights the scales perfectly, she is never less than fair.

But fairness is a jurisdictive virtue not a journalistic one, and the dogged pursuit of it makes most of her book flat, passionless, oddly centrifugal. The proper core of the thing – the hunt itself – is not there; it's missing because Blackwood can't summon it. She lacks even the most basic gift for topography; the elemental drama of the chase is beyond her stunted capacity for description; she doesn't know the names of trees. Her style is prosy, bereft of specificity; it's the written analogue of a shrug and a 'you know'.

Yet for all that *In The Pink* is acute enough when the author is quoting from an extant source or from one of her interviewees. She has read the literature of the hunt from Nimrod and

Surtees through Eysenck's statistically based study of MFHs, and she is a good listener. She descends with her patrician tape-recorder and noble notepad upon some 'car-hunter' or apostate hunter's widow or octogenarian colonel, fixes them with eyes the size of a tarsier's, and invites them to spout (and, incidentally, to confirm all dicta about the tendency of humankind to confide in strangers).

The picture put together by this piecemeal means is hardly coherent let alone elegant but it does contain some sharply focused stuff beyond the predictable mix of sentimentality, bullying and craven bowing to 'tradition'. There are glimpses of the halt 'hunting by phone' which sounds rather more satisfactory than having sex by phone. You realize that the point of the fox *is* its very nastiness as food – even *Larousse Gastronomique* which would make omnivores of us all, concedes that its flesh is 'extremely unpleasant'; were it a comestible the hunt would descend from being derived from a royal perversion of functional food-gathering to mere utility. Further, you get a sense of the mania with which both devotees and opponents become contaminated while the cause of the mania remains determinedly three fields away. Most of all, however, the book impresses not as a half baked series of would-be colour-mag articles captiously hinting at the moral moment of its subject but as a monument, an unwitting monument sure, to the resilience and immutability of three backwaters of British society. The predominantly lower middle class lefties, life sentence 'alternatives', who make up the saboteurs. The cowering rural poor. The useless upper and upper middle classes who are unable to compete in today's harsh meritocracy and have opted out on horseback: the unanswered question the book perpetually begs is 'What do they do for a living, these bods who hunt five days a week?'

In the Pink by Caroline Blackwood

1987

Cute Little Flopsies

How often, having been engaged in conversation by a tobacco and Worthington stained stranger in the saloon bar of a provincial hotel, have you been nudged violently in the ribs and told in complete confidence that the barmaid fucks like a rabbit? These persons, I can now reveal, know as little about rabbits as they do about plump lardy Mavis. Rabbits couple once a week during the eight months of the year when the buck is potent, and the doe litters, during that period, once a month. Coitus lasts only for a few seconds and is often accompanied by nasal grunts; after he is spent the buck will often keel over on to his back and lie prone for a moment or two before trying it again. That's all.

Mr Lockley's book is mainly an account of a life-history study he undertook during the years 1954–9 when myxomatosis was taking its huge toll to the delight of farmers, fruit growers and other persons whose dented Volvos feed off the soil. From Skokholm, an island off the Pembrokeshire coast that he had once owned, he brought uninfected rabbits to his enclosure on the mainland at Orielton. There, in conditions which approximated as closely as one can conceive to the wild state, he minutely observed and recorded his subjects' social life. The result is as fascinating as Maeterlinck's books on ants and every bit as entertaining. Not scared, in the interests of readability, to court anthropomorphism he prefers to give his rabbits names rather than numbers and notes that 'as we shall see throughout our story, humans are so rabbit.' For instance, there's a 'character' called Timid Timothy, described as an ageing 'bachelor' which, quotes and all, will no doubt call to the reader's mind Mr Edward Heath who, so far as we know,

is not yet reduced to relying on dropping his faeces to define the boundaries of the territory he considers his own. Mr Lockley constructed from concrete a warren which could be viewed in section through glass; the rabbits do not seem to have been overdisturbed by this surveillance and lived, so far as he could tell, as they would in natural warrens, dark deep labyrinths which the buck excavates in short strenuous bursts aided by the slower but more persistent doe. Parents take precedence over their offspring, inhabiting the deepest, and so safest and warmest part of the warren, and not always tolerating the more vigorous antics of the young.

All rabbits are coprophagic; for the moment I can, among humans, think only of Dali as admitting to this taste – it's the kind of thing about which people like, say, Geoffrey Rippon, inexplicably and jocularly known as the 'Third Minister', tend to keep quiet. Were the fact of this unusual taste widely broadcast sales of pet rabbits might slump, a point to ponder. Mr Lockley invokes old Freud in his explanation of why they are such popular pets opining that their generally peaceful nature – no mention is made of the buck's habit of biting off the tops of the leverets' heads – and seductive roundness is suggestive of 'the warmth of the womb and the round vaginal entrance through which the child has been expelled into this world of pain, coldness and fear, and to which it subconsciously longs to return.' Jewish tomfoolery is further evident when Mr Lockley refers to those dietary laws set down in Deuteronomy which forbid the eating of animals, including the rabbit, which chew the cud. Generally though the author and the sources he dishes up are eminently sensible.

Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald has written on a huge variety of country topics from Romanies to the Hampshire Avon; although he lives, so far as I can gather – he's not precise about it – somewhere between Farnham and Frensham, which isn't exactly the heart of what's left of rural England, he considers himself a true countryman, belonging to a generation which took its cue in such matters from the heroes of Buchan. Characteristically then, and probably quite rightly,

he has little but lightly veiled contempt for armchair naturalists to whom he refers as 'the experts'. He sets the tone of his admirable and varied account of foxes with the very first line: 'The fox lives on the wind, that is the one thing I am quite certain about. For the rest, how little we know about the fox as an animal.' Quite – nowadays we know more about foxes as jackals and broadcasting commissars; let's not forget the cunning, stealthy, winning animal which leased its name to these persons and which owes its contemporary celebrity to suburban appearances – in Bromley recently a local worthy announced that the vulpine population was a danger to the children of the borough – and to its featured role in the boring enduring battle between boorish sportsmen and whining anti-bloodsporters; both parties are equally ludicrous, one day a race of masterfoxes will savage them all. Mr Vesey-Fitzgerald has adroitly drawn on hunting and other literature from Aesop to the present day, quoting extensively from William Somerville, Peter Beckford and Trollope to give some indication of the awe in which the beast has consistently been held. The fox is endowed with some marvellous attributes, notably its ability to govern the scent that it lays, its quite remarkable memory, its powers of mimicry, all which, it is claimed, give him a good chance of evading the pack; they are not much use though to the fox caught in a trap who will keep silent and gnaw off the injured limb if it can. Mercifully traps are becoming a rarity and foxes are flourishing – we are far from the days when they had to be imported from France and sold to hunts at Leadenhall Market; the author estimated the population in 1965 at about forty thousand. This pleasant and very detailed work is well worth its paltry price.

Mr Vesey-Fitzgerald records that Shakespeare makes thirty-five references to the fox. Evidently he's something of an amateur of the bard for he is quoted in septuagenarian Maurice Burton's *The Hedgehog* as having drawn attention to the following words (no source is given and I was unable to track it down – although on that journey I did discover that a 'hedgepriest' was a derogatory term for the lower members of the clergy): 'Thrice and once the hedgepig whined . . .' Burton

goes on: 'Vesey-Fitzgerald says that this is the typical call of a boar hedgehog looking for a mate: three short whistles then a fourth and longer one. I have to confess I have not heard this.' This scepticism is typical of the bore Burton, an 'expert' of the sort Vesey-Fitzgerald mocks, who with tedious predictability challenges the veracity of nearly all previously accepted data while offering little that's new to replace it. All that Burton comes up with that is positive is an assertion that hedgehogs are as dissimilar in their habits, one from another, as are humans – which is about as useful as knowing that birth, life and death are the only certainties. Still, one interesting fact does emerge – it is from the family name Erinaceus that we derive the word 'urchin'.

Space and opening time – I'm hoping for a hint from a regular as to which barmaid is worth the trouble – prevents me from saying more than that Jeffrey Harrison's book contains the best photographs – there's nothing nocturnal about geese or ducks, save when eaten or poached in the small hours – of these initial offerings in the Survival series and that it is the most 'environmentally' conscious of them, waving a justly accusatory finger at oil companies who couldn't care less, and at 'marsh cowboys' armed with shotguns who present a continual threat to the existence of many aves. Maybe – hopefully – he underestimates the adaptability of many species who, just like us, have continually to be finding new modes of life to cope with the quickest change artist of them all – the physical world.

The Private Life of the Rabbit by R M Lockley
Town Fox, Country Fox by Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald
The Hedgehog by Maurice Burton
A Wealth of Wildfowl by Jeffrey Harrison

1973

Trudge Off

Bernard Price is a man of whom I know nothing save that he calls himself a writer and is to be found on a BBC2 effort called 'In The Country'. In the Nothing Of The Sort, you might say. Rather, put it this way – the 'country' to which the programme devotes itself is the institutionalized country of folkloric and agricultural museums, of the Countryside Commission and CoSIRA, of planners with their mania for classification of 'scapes', of officially designated places of beauty etc. This is the country that is an 'amenity' (English Tourist Board approved) – a sort of gigantic park occupied by an army of trad craftsmen, environmentally concerned smallholders, farmhouse cooks, canal restorers and so on.

This country is a cosy sort of place and of course has little to do with most of the sticks. It is the country seen through towny eyes or at least through the eyes of a countryman who knows what the towny wants to see – or *thinks* he knows. Such a countryman is Bernard Price. He is a professional countryman in the way that Trueman and Parkinson are professional tykes, i.e. he gives the people what they expect, is a walking stereotype. And a striding stereotype. And a trudging one too. Here he comes with his big ruddy wind-blown face and his trusty cleft stick and his thick neck – like some kind of kine. He's wearing a rough tweed jacket with two vents for his plump walker's bum to protrude through, cavalry twills tucked into ribbed socks, great big hefty boots. Bernard and the Beeb reckon that this outfit tells us that our man is outdoorsy, in touch with the land, strong, virtuous, someone who knows the names of flowers by the good old

country names and has no truck with fancy Latin nomenclature.

This is where Bernard and the Beeb differ from me. I'm afraid that this preposterous outfit tells me no such thing. It looks thoroughly bogus. We all know that Bernard has not walked any further than required by the cameraman. It is, I suppose, a harmless masquerade and by no means so ghastly as the commentary that Bernard provides to the endless pictures of him striding hither and thither. In a programme devoted to landscapes and the way in which various painters have represented them it is inappropriate (not to say insulting to the painters) to have this porky, dundrearied berk plonking himself in the frame at every possible opportunity, as if to prove the point that 'man is a vital ingredient in landscape', and it is even more inappropriate to detract from the landscapes and buildings with a commentary that contrives to be at once purple *and* ungrammatical. This is Bernard talking about the tide mill at Woodbridge: 'Short steep ladders leap between floors as though they were the decks of an East Indiaman.' Wonderful stuff. What he means is that the conjunction of floors and ladders reminds him of a clipper or some such vessel. Ladders do *not* leap, they are inanimate objects which may be caused by some agency to move in a manner that suggests leaping. What we have here is the pathetic fallacy, anthropomorphic whimsy. Bernard is an adept of both these great wrong ideas. He thinks he is being poetic when he says things like 'the North Sea revels on the beach . . . flags fly valiantly.' He is not being poetic or, rather, he is merely dealing in the sort of orotund clichés that give poetry a bad name; a landscape *cannot* be 'soul searching'. To describe it so is to admit unwittingly to a gross misunderstanding of language, of the physical world, of man's place in it. In a similar way Bernard is unable to distinguish between a verb that is transitive and one that is intransitive.

Even when Bernard keeps his syntactical ambitions in check and successfully parses a sentence he talks balls or, on special occasions, absolute balls.

He describes John Ireland walking across the South Downs,

'filling his amazing musical memory so when he returned home in the evening music poured out of him.' This grovelling reverence for – awful term – the creative process is again deprecatory of the individual artist and numbingly philistine in its implication that the artist's 'raw materials' (i.e. the sounds heard on the downs) are more important than the transformation to which he subjects them. Bernard seems to ignore this transformation – and is capable of recognizing *technique*.

Of course it may transpire that Bernard has been put up to all this and is in fact nothing like the creature that I have represented. I only say this because after I had written a piece about the superbloke John Romer a few weeks ago I was importuned by a number of people who knew the man and said that he is in fact shy, retiring etc, and that he was a puppet or putty or something in the hands of his director, Paul Watson. I gather that Ann Barr and Francis Kyle have formed a Friends Of John Romer Defence League. Do they know Bernard? Will they do the same for him, lucky fellow? Ann, Francis, ring me with your excuses for Bernard's behaviour.

1982

Bloke, Bloker, Blokest

I hate blokiness. Do you hate blokiness? Do you know what it is? The word, I admit, is not current – it belongs to that generation to which a piss artist is a braggart, not a toper – but the quality it denotes is ubiquitous. What I am talking about is the effortful striving to be one of the lads or a person of the people or the ordinary working man (whose father was that curious fellow the man in the street). This striving manifests itself in over-familiarity, in hail-fellow-well-met matiness, in a creeping eagerness to please. It is to be found in politicians (mostly Labour but by no means exclusively), in the Archbishop of Canterbury, in many publicans and their regulars, in nearly all the berks who do the regional bits of 'Nationwide', in Benny Green and Stuart Hall and Fred Housego, in the execrable 'entertainers' who have their own telly shows, in those grinning fools (strangers to pride) on celebrity quiz shows, in beery folk singers, in disc jockeys. Oh I could go on – there are some news-readers who, given the chance, will sing or dance or inflate condoms to show how big-hearted and ordinary they are. The BBC has, you may have noticed, now un-earthed an archaeologist who is clearly fit to join these ranks.

Unearthed – I'm not sure actually if that is so apt: maybe he is someone's invention. He was evidently expected to do for the ancient world what David Bellamy has done for plants. And I suspect that he has succeeded for although he suffers the massive disadvantage of having no major speech impediment he has done a very nice job of rendering his subject subservient to his mannerisms. He is called John Romer and his programmes, recently shown on BBC2, are called 'Romer's

Egypt'. Of course there is no particular reason why an Egyptologist should not be or appear to be a fugitive from a lager advertisement – cor I could shift a few, line 'em up Trev – and I can imagine the producer's delight when he discovered an archaeologist with the common touch, the really common touch. An archaeologist for the 80s, and so on. Mr Romer, for all I know, is a respected and 'important' figure in his field. But I doubt that this is what attracted the BBC. What attracted the BBC, I am sure, is the fact that Mr Romer hailed, as they say, from somewhere east of Liverpool Street and west of Gant's Hill. So all he had to do preparatory to his BBC funded holiday in Egypt was to revisit for a few nights some pubs in Leyton and Canning Town and drink in a spot of that old local vernacular. Then: off up the Nile where some o' them ol' Gyppo ice creams hung out. (Ice cream = ice cream freezer = geezer, if you must know.)

The conception is balefully wrongheaded. It is based on the most arrant inverse snobbery. The very title '*Romer*'s Egypt' is a gross cheek – but then, on the way up, why not grab credit even where it is manifestly not due. There is nothing less obfuscating about Mr Romer's wilfully slangy, horribly slovenly approach than there is about the preciousness and logomaniac jargon of more orthodox academics. Slang is fine, like any other mode of speech, if it is fresh and witty and appropriate. But Mr Romer's is hackneyed; it's as if he had written a script in despised standard English and had then crudely translated it into cabbie-speak. (''E 'ad no personality cult goin' for 'im.' This was practically the first thing he said about one poor king.) The result is excruciatingly self-conscious. And Mr Romer's appearance did not compensate for his bathetic speech; his mouth bore quite a few disagreeable sores that suggested he had been putting it in places where it is not sage to put one's mouth when in Port Said.

As for the information that the programmes imparted, the way they looked, the notions that Mr Romer was keen to foist . . . Well, it is a commonplace that every society founds its conception of former societies upon itself, but you would never have thought so from the way that Mr Romer let us in

on what was evidently his very own *aperçu*. Surely he knows that the Shakespeare of the 18th century was a paragon of reason and that the Shakespeare of the mid 19th century was a champion of mercantile expansionism; surely he knows that historical novels, like sci-fi novels, are as much about the age when they are written as about that whereof they speak. And the man's arrogance in assuming that today's knowledge of the past is somehow definitive, unimprovable, is quite staggering. He also gave us this one: 'All 'uman societies fashion their images of death from the landscapes they inhabit.' To which there is no answer save a numbed 'Oh really'.

The BBC knows very well that its popularizers need not resort to this lowest common denominator stuff. Attenborough, Nairn, Hoskins – none of these men has ever treated his audience to so profligate a display of oikishness and gaucheness as did Mr Romer. At the moment Alec Clifton Taylor is trotting round 'Six More English Towns' (Tuesday BBC2). One can think of no more signal contrast to the ghastly Romer. Sir Alec is civil, prodigiously knowledgeable, an excellent *social* as well as architectural historian; and he talks well and clearly – if anyone doesn't know what vermicular rustication is they will find out. He has the good manners to explain himself as he goes along. His programmes have no resort to gimmickry – no artily self-conscious photography, no awful electronic music. I am sure too that they cost an awful lot less than Romer's Nile jag.

1982

The Scrumpy Bar Kid

I do not recall the years I spent at school in west Somerset with much affection. The place was notable for its philistinism and dismal anglicanism; my fellow pupils were the scions of Devon farming families and the south Walian bourgeoisie; the ambient ethos was one of illiberal piety – one was receiving an education in fear of life. Still, there were compensations: an egregious English master (hi, Boris, how are you?) who fostered the germ of literary discernment; the late Peter Harvey who was an inspiredly terse teacher of French; most of all there was the countryside. The Quantocks and Blackdowns and Brendons are sumptuous hill country. On Sundays, between the parentheses of Mass and Evensong, I would cycle to them: at Mass I was too adolescently bolshie to kneel, at Evensong I was in no condition to do anything else. Blame scrumpy.

I doubt – I *know* – that I never thought much about what it was that I used to buy to lubricate my cycle rides. The criteria were cheapness, alcohol content and a vessel that could be accommodated by my capacious saddle-bag. The stuff was invariably cloudy when purchased (from farms at Halse or Huish Champflower or Clatworthy) and was thoroughly opaque by the time we had cycled up to the Wellington Monument or to the metal railway viaduct near, I think, Wiveliscombe – there to drink from plastic mugs, smoke Nelsons or Bristols, talk about girls and (as the apple took its hold) boast about girls. The ride back would be executed at about six m.p.h.

Cider was not confined to term time. My home town, Salisbury, is at least forty miles from the cider belt that arcs

from the Marches through Gloucestershire, Avon (as it wasn't then called) and Somerset to Devon. Yet there, five minutes' walk from the cathedral, next to the bus station was the Brewery Tap. Now, most bars that bear such a name are to be found, literally, within the site of a brewery. This one wasn't; and I can only assume that the local brewery, Gibbs Mew, was ashamed to have the place under its wing. It had something to be ashamed of. The Tap was the size of a mean front room, furnished with a couple of trestles, a bench and some nastily splintered folding chairs which the majority of the clientele was in no condition to sit on. On the bar rested four barrels. Behind it swayed mine host. The purposes of his hostelry were tipsiness, drunkenness, dead drunkenness, obliteration. The cider (of unknown provenance) was markedly stronger than the stuff from Taunton vale farms. Predictably, stories of rats, pieces of meat and heaven knows what abounded. Three pints was six times too much. When, some years later, I cooked a Norman supper for some friends and served (for want of the real stuff which was yet difficult to find in London) still Herefordshire cider one of them, the author of this season's best seller 'Pearls', said: 'Cider always reminds me of when I was poor.' Quite: that's the trouble with it – it is burdened with the associations of indigence, adolescent abuse, making-do, the gutter. So one prejudice against it is akin to that against offal – it is founded in a socio-economic rather than a gastronomic base; this prejudice does not differentiate between cider and the gaseous, carbonated, chemical, heavily-advertised sheep-dip that shares its name, that has usurped its name. There are further prejudices, the greatest of which is equally deep-seated though founded in a different, more complicated system of snobberies. Norman Douglas, the epicurean traveller and novelist, the author of *inter alia* 'South Wind' and 'Venus In The Kitchen', wrote that he experienced a mighty relief when he got south of the latitude of, say, Genoa and Toulouse because there he was entering the culture of the tomato and the olive and leaving behind the culture of the apple. The generalized idea of The South is one that has, increasingly throughout this century, attracted the inhabitants

of northern climes – part of its attraction has been caused by its increased accessibility. And the third fundamental fruit of The South, with the tomato and the olive, is, of course, the grape whose flexibility and possibilities and bibulous potential make the apple look like a carthorse beside a Derby sprinter. The grape is infinitely subtle, the apple isn't; it isn't a *medium* that prompts the attentions of those who would cause it to mutate into something marvellous. Isn't it? Maybe the failure is not the failure of the fruit but – as is usually the case with 'lowly' materials – of human resourcefulness; maybe the material is not that lowly after all. Maybe its status in the collective brain, on the collective tongue, devolves from its familiarity, its lack of exoticism, from being taken for granted.

We do not yet take Spain for granted – I'm not referring to the Spain of Torrid and Playa del Hell, but to the great and varied mass to the north of those dumps. There, in the far north, in the Asturias, where liquors are flavoured with aniseed, wine is not the everyday drink. Cider is, just as it is in Normandy and much of Brittany. But there is a difference: northern, peninsular, Brittany and Normandy do not grow vines. Places such as Oviedo do – there are vines on the sides of houses, vines on wires across the roads, vines on poles. Go into a simple restaurant and without beckoning you may be brought upon arrival a bottle of vino verde. It looks just like the stuff you've been drinking in Galicia, in the shellfish city of Santiago or in La Coruña which is Spain's Bournemouth. But there's something amiss, odd. This is not wine, this is cider. And, as if to emphasize the fact, the sauce with your hake (it's always hake) is reduced from cider: in the reduction the source of the sauce becomes more discernible. Cider is the drink and, often, the cooking agent in this area not because it is cheaper – it isn't – but because it excites gastronomic preference. The very excellence of Asturian cider militates against its availability in this country: Mr Moreno of Moreno Wines, which is the retailer of the most comprehensive range of Spanish stuff in London, if not the UK, has tried it out – but there is no audience for it, its price is not much below that of Catalan Cava. And no one wants cider when he can have

bubbly *made from grape*. What cider needs is PR that matches it, that elevates it in the right way.

It has to be lifted from the cups of drunken teenagers and aged winos into the acceptable mainstream. The nature of proselytization is that anything is first taken up by buffs, specialists, hardcore enthusiasts who will inevitably tend to write *parti pris* and laud with indiscrimination. Six years ago, sick with the righteous propaganda of CAMRA, I invented an organization called CAMKAM (Campaign for Keg and Musak) and wrote its manifesto in a magazine I was then editing. This devil's advocacy did not come off. The Real Ale establishment did not get the joke, did not understand that this was a means of castigating its solemnity: indeed, the article was taken so seriously that I was invited to appear on a telly programme with some toughs from CAMRA and to tell them just why it was that I preferred keg beer. Cider is presently in its CAMRA stage. This time I shall keep quiet.

Actually I won't. Cider seems to have been hijacked as a cause by the same sort of person that turned beer into a bore. This sort of person, whose vocabulary includes such words as quaff and wassail, belongs to the sodality of the institutionalized outdoorsy: it strides as it quaffs as it restores canals/walks footpaths/frequents countryside museums. This sort of person is no more than a life-raft to real cider: it drives the drink into a folksy cul de sac, it shifts it from one sub-culture into another, it invests it with sentimental respectability, it conscripts it into the great social lie about honest toilers and the golden age. (Golden ages always turn out to have been made of lead.) This form of rehabilitation is peculiarly English because in any other country the rehabilitation would be conducted along gustatory lines and all the folklore would be secondary. If it is necessary to the encouragement to appreciate cider, so be it. My own view is that a more effete approach might work as well.

The link between cider and country (by which I mean its place of origin) has to be severed. When we drink, say, Laphroaig we may get the message that says *peat* but we do

not feel beholden to pretend to be crofters. The spirit overcomes its home. It is appreciated for its essence. Its *goût du terroir* is abundantly manifest but it plays just as well away from home. Cider, like whisky, like wine, should not be regarded as a purely rural drink. Its agrocentricity is a debilitating red herring. I'd as soon drink Dunkerton's (which is the best cider I've tasted in years, in this country or any other) in a north London sitting room as on a Weobley midden. But that's just taste.

1987

Sickmas

No resting actor with a red habit and a red riding hood and a frizzy white full-set and a taproom baritone and taproom breath ever had me sit on his lap so that I might feel how pleased he was to see me. I came through that labour of infancy unscathed. I was not – creepy euphemism – 'interfered with'. Score so far: Me 9, Santa 0. I get nine because for three consecutive years I was taken to three Santa lairs: I got to meet Santa in Bournemouth, Santa in Salisbury, Santa in Southampton. When you're tiny there's only one Santa. The part is greater than the player: I can't remember being troubled by the fact that Santa at, say, Bobby's in Bournemouth was short and stank of British sherry while Santa at the misnamed Style and Gerrish in Salisbury was tall, fat and stank of cooking brandy. At that age I guess you're not even sure Santa is human – small children possess an infinite capacity for the suspension of disbelief, they can't (at least I couldn't) even see past the costume of a duff actor unable to get a gig in panto; strata of reality that later become distinguishable are all scrambled and homogenized when you're only just out of nappies. When we're older we get better at telling make-believe from the diurnal grind, don't we? Surely we do. We do, save at Christmas.

Me 9, Santa 0? I flatter myself. Santa may, between burping up his lunch of reindeer meat (Venison St Nicholas), have kept his mitts off but he did leave a mark. Those terror trips to his dinky, twinkling, in-store shanty did teach me a lesson.

These Santas – they'll all be in a sunset-home now, quarrelling among each other about whose turn to dress in red it is this year – those Santas unwittingly instructed me that the

real colours of Christmas are not the pillarbox of their costume, nor the green of just-stolen conifers, nor the pinchbeck heraldic silvers and golds of streamers and tinsel. They instructed me that the true colours of Christmas are these: Nicotine Brown – Santa always had a Capstan Full Strength habit that manifested itself on his ungroping fingers, on the fringes of his cottonwool moustache and, no doubt, on his lungs (Santa has emphysema now); Veal Grey – that's the colour Santa's tongue was, because of his diet, and British sherry; Milky Pink – Santa's eyes, and again, I'm afraid, we have to point a finger at British sherry.

These are the colours of Christmas because they are the colours of alcoholic delirium. They are the colours you see through swimmy, sicky lenses, through eyes constellated with motes and particulates, smear-washed with cess, through eyes that tell the brain that it's forever dusk. Of course this frightful gauze can befall your eyes any time, of course you can be drunk or legless or badered the whole year round. But you can't be drunk the way you're drunk at Christmas the whole year round. What indeed is special about the Christmas blinder is that it's leapt into from a high-board of comparative sobriety. A career drunk like Jeffrey Bernard cannot ascend to a sufficient height whence to make this leap. There's a world of difference between the slide into chronic and invariable overindulgence, i.e. habit, i.e. a pint of grain spirit daily, and the big leap (double pike with jack and fancy bit) that dumps you in the Xmas silt. There's a world of difference too between the sheer wilful recklessness of the seasonal binger and the way that the all-the-year-round dipso paces himself and does his best not to nobble the amino-acids that oil his liver.

The cumulative effect of this annual pursuit is that, like Santas, all Christmases are remembered – which word is obviously a boast in this context – as one. They are compressed. They all smell the same. Did you sleep in the phone box the same year that the mini-cab driver swore until bubbles danced along his meaty lips? Did you mislay a goose (hot, stuffed, basted) between the oven and the dining room the same year that you tried to set light to the French pharmacist

whose name no one seemed to know? And wherever did you meet the coachdriver from Hartlepool who spent Christmas Day asleep on the sitting room floor? Why did you take two hours to crawl the fifteen feet to the bathroom? – it may of course have been two minutes or an entire afternoon. Time, reason, cause, sequence – these are seasonal casualties, these all take industrial action during Goodwill Week, a week that's like a tunnel.

It's a tunnel with turns in it, and it's perpetual, it's a circular jail. And wherever there's light there are the awful colours of Christmas. This incarceration in your own damaged self is the one certainty. For the rest, anything can happen – though you won't remember it happening. The great thing about being gravely bevvied is the consequent amnesia. This amnesia is the most joyful aspect of the wretched season: when you scour your internal file for photos of this party that you may have been to you'll discover the developer didn't work the way it was meant to. Thus the postlude to it all is an inviting blank. It – whatever *it* was or wasn't – may never have happened. Maybe you were fine.

1986

The Man Who Was Mad: Jeffrey Bernard

Research shows that Jeffrey Bernard consumes his own body weight in pure grain spirit once every three months. Were the bottles whose contents he has drunk since he got a taste for the stuff in his mid teens laid end to end they would stretch from the Coach and Horses to the Maudsley; line up all the other empties (pop, plonk, brandy etc.) and the vitreous trail extends to the Royal Bethlem at Beckenham. Another very interesting statistic is that if he was to put a message in each of them and launch them at Beachy Head they'd constitute the loudest May Day ever heard in the Channel. The trouble with writing about him is that he is chronically, persistently revelatory about this man who shares his name, whom he calls 'I'; there may be no beans left to spill.

Anyway, Jeffrey Bernard is a 50 year old orphan and single parent who has been unattached (offers, please, from amply proportioned ladies only to the Coach and Horses, Greek St, W1) since the fourth Mrs Bernard made the unstartling discovery that his way of life was inconsistent with that of Mr Right. Jeffrey's mother was an opera singer and his father was the stage and interior designer and architect Oliver Bernard. Oliver Bernard was *the* English master of the style that used to be called *Jazz Modern* and is now called, by yobs in antique markets, *Ar Dekker*; he was responsible for, inter alia, the Strand Palace and Cumberland hotels and numerous liners. At this point the 'profile' writer is meant to indicate some correlation between the father's and the son's art, but I'm afraid that things are simply not that easy – the glitter and opulence that characterizes the father's stuff has gone missing. We should not be surprised: Jeffrey is a triumph of self

determination over the tyranny of genes. He did not get where he is today by chance but rather by deciding at an early age where he wanted to end up and heading single-mindedly down there (though not that far down – 'Low Life' is a bit of a misnomer, his life strikes me as being richer if more fraught than that led by the majority).

'All people who are more or less interesting are more or less their own inventions.' I forget who coined that truism, but it's quite apt – it is only boors and dolts who constantly draw attention to their roots, and they do so because they have failed to flower themselves. Now, you might wonder why anyone would want to invent themselves in Jeffrey's image unless he stood a good chance of becoming a remittance man, and that was out of the question – there was no grand name to besmirch and no one to mail the cheque. Still, invent himself he did and here he is: a former minor public schoolboy (Pangbourne – 'like being in the nick' – whose most famous non-naval alumnus he is), sometime fairground worker, boxer, cook, barman, stagehand, actor, labourer, pornshop salesperson (flogged Kenneth Tynan and several MPs their spanking mags), debtor, serial polygamist, teetotaller etc., etc. Here he is today, and most other days too, clutching a glass of what will probably end up in a cocktail book as a 'Bernard' (vodka, lime, ice, soda) and an untipped cigarette which he lit with a match by Bryant and May of Gloucester. His face is constantly active. When he is not smoking or drinking or talking he is running his tongue round the inside of his mouth 'as though he hopes to find some loose change in there' (Anon. 1982). He does this with zeal. He drinks with something beyond zeal, a sort of dutiful absorption. He is a small thin man whose legs look painfully skinny in the jeans that he habitually wears. He looks more like a jockey than a boxer, he has none of the old bruiser's usual complement of fruit 'n' veg disfigurements (women tell me he's a dish). On his feet are Chelsea boots; if he wears a tie it is one that was given him; for the cold he has what marines know as a pea jacket. We are all of us caught in some sartorial time-warp, Jeff's is *Town* magazine circa 1963 with a spot of racecourse thrown

in. If that makes him sound spivvish, like Michael Heseltine, *Town*'s sometime owner (and his sometime employer) it's not meant to. He's really far too lacking in the sort of petty pushiness that is the sine qua non of the politician to bother with that sort of *front*; indeed he is pretty well bereft of any talent for jobbery. His lack of front and his insouciant tastelessness and inspired rudeness are attractive if you don't happen to be on the receiving end. If though you happen to be three legless north British football fans who barge into a man at the bar who tells you to 'fuck off back to where you came from you Glaswegian cunts' you probably don't find it attractive and will think the man lucky to have a tyro minder with more Dutch courage than sense to step in and make placatory noises. Also you won't find it attractive if you're the man who at Jeffrey's fiftieth birthday party (no food, neat spirits, everybody badered) fell in a lump at the host's feet and was jocularly kicked in the ribs and told to 'behave or get out'. If I'm making Jeffrey sound like a 'character' I'm misleading you and belittling him.

Certainly columnists often *are* 'characters'. They trade on a personality that is merely an attitude or a flock of opinions. They write *parti pris*. You are familiar with them: *A* gives you crackerbarrel shit with heathermix whimsy. *B* is a prolix, self-regarding libertarian. *C*'s institutionalized bonhomie stinks of real ale, dogs, Volvos, jockstraps. *D* is all pomposity, euphuism, leather on willow. They give each other awards. They call each other *Mister* A, B, C. They evince a ghastly sort of clubbishness. Their horizons often seem limited. Jeffrey Bernard's columnar horizons are limited too, but he gives you much more than an attitude or a personality. He gives you *his life* for an exceedingly modest weekly fee. I'm not claiming that this is a virtue, just recording it as a fact. Indeed one of the reasons that he writes so consistently about himself is that he is too lazy to write about anything else; the consequence is that he has to expose more and more in a series of harrowing autoanalytical beaver shots – not very wholesome, perhaps, but clear evidence that the man is in close touch with his heart and nerves. The candour that informs his writing is

outside the conventions of current British journalism, it's not part of the *professional* columnist's repertoire, it's more the kind of quality that is associable with confessional fiction; Jeffrey's carapace was torn off a long time back. Either that or it got eaten away by the marinade he has subjected himself to.

Of course he does have a set of opinions just like those 'colleagues' whose conventions he ignores, whose emotional *omerta* he has broken; (actually he is friendly with Mister B). And just as comedians have mothers in law so does he have everyone who ever laid pen to paper for a woman's page and everyone he has ever been married to as standing butts. But, like I say, he is different from the rest of the pack in more ways than he is like it. I suspect though that certain of the open wounds that he puts on display are no more genuine than those of the 'scaldrum dodgers', the 'creative' beggars of Victorian London; thus his columns are sometimes a bit akin to those of the shriller feminists of half a dozen years ago. I suppose you might call him a faint hearted masculist.

So: having established him at the bar of the Coach and Horses – the door nearer Mecca is his preferred gateway to the working day, let us backtrack a few hours and a mile north by north west to the time when Jeffrey can tell a hawk from a gas pump. After a night of fitful sleep and nightmares in which Colin Welland and Jill Tweedie are playing Pass The Swab while he lies on the operating table he gets up, does some serious coughing (so he says) and then does his day's writing. By ten o'clock he is ready for the day's work so he steps out on to Great Portland Street and heads south into Soho where he takes up his perch, keeping on the qui vive for the representatives of publishers from whom he has had advances but to whom he hasn't delivered the goods and for women. 'I always think that any woman who won't sit on my face must hate me.' He is wrong in this as he is about editors. He is damagingly self effacing – you might call it paranoid, and he always appears astonished that anyone wants to know about him; this often extends to an off-handedness that is no doubt a mask for shyness or something. This is not the only adolescent trait he exhibits.

His are not, mark, the adolescent traits which denizens of *Private Eye* are alleged to possess. (Jeffrey is P.N.G. at the *Eye* nowadays because, surprise, 'he gets pissed.') No, Jeffrey's perpetual adolescence is that of the tearaway. Work for its own sake, marital and parental responsibilities – that sort of stuff makes him feel very bad indeed; they make many people feel very bad indeed but Jeffrey acts on how he feels. He retains a young man's preoccupation with sexual conquest and is impressed by the ability of successful jockeys to demand sexual favours as well as their fees – mounts for mounts. He also likes parties so much that he tries to turn most days into one: this means that he treks from pub to club to club, he never knows where he is going to end up. The collective drunkenness of afternoon drinking clubs makes for a curious egalitarianism – septuagenarian pornographers, incredibly famous painters, failed actors, restaurateurs, 'film producers', 'entrepreneurs' are united in their incapacity to do anything but hiss monosyllabic insults, drink and pee on their shoes. Jeffrey moves through these places like a mischievous anarch, stirring things and causing scenes because here again he is *egregious*, i.e. outside the flock. He is *sui generis* and pays the price for being so (he has never had more than £1,100 to his name). He loathes criminals (their patronization by showbiz wallahs), is really rather bookish and knows an awful lot more about lit than he's ever let on. He is good company. His autobiography will be remarkable if he can remember the facts and the faces (Dylan Thomas, Tony Hancock, Julian Maclaren Ross, Elizabeth Smart who gave him his first journalistic work, his brother Bruce, Brian the Burglar, Derek Jameson, Charles St George, lots of agreeable girls etc). Meanwhile we have his weekly notes towards that imaginary book and they make a remarkable oeuvre in themselves.

1982

Beneath The Ground In Piedmont

The truffle depends on the oak (with which it forms a *mycorrhiza* – funguspeak for symbiosis), the town depends on the truffle (that's folklore, but believe it). PR men depend on mercantile outfits – wineries, say; and hacks depend (torpidly, notoriously) on PR men. Neat, eh? And look, I haven't used the words pimp, sponge, leech, ride – so far, so kosher. Pig ignorance: now there's a conjunction of words I'm going to have to use. ''Orns. Men with 'orns,' the accent is stage Taf, 'what about them like? Do you 'ave men with 'orns and the pink jackets and that? You know, 'unting pink.' Young Dogliano is a) Too polite, or b) Too unfamiliar with Cymric yap, or c) Too unfamiliar with stirrup cup and county cows on nags to register incredulity at Taf's question. He looks for help to his English friends; he's a charming boy, two hours and he has already made friends with the lot of them. Some of the English friends appear to find nothing risible in what the poor Welsh berk has just said, the others smother their sniggers. One of the sniggerers bites his tongue and puts Taf right: One does not actually *hunt* truffles in that way, there is no chase, it is like looking for invisible mushrooms, the dogs are *not* sleek compliant assassins like foxhounds, it is a rural *business*, it is secretive and nocturnal, there is no ceremony. And so on. Taf looks dubious. He'll find out. (The only correspondence that can be drawn between hunting and looking for truffles is that of the facial metamorphoses that afflict those who go in for these pursuits. The unspeakable are mythically prone to acquire equine features and it is indisputable that one of the two Albans who calls himself Il Re di Tartuffi has a pallid tuberous face . . .)

He finds out the next day in the course of what Paul Levy, in a smart proprietorial move, called 'The *Observer* Truffle Hunt'. It was neither; though I guess the fact that Lonhro had sent a team of *five* perhaps entitled Paul to his little boast. It was certainly *not* a truffle hunt; it was, rather, a laborious and chaotic simulation of one. As I say, it usually takes place at night and furtively – this because Adriano does not want to reveal to Giovanni the whereabouts of 'his' truffles. Also, Adriano is not keen to reveal the size of his troves – the tax on this preposterously expensive fungus is more than 30%. So here we are in the white light of a snowcrisp day on the point of witnessing a sort of nuit américaine version of A and G's rude search. They wait beside the road, wrapped in ragged coats and mufflers, with faces by Longhini. Their dogs are wretched ill fed mongrels. They are trained by gnarled rustics who sleep on mattresses stuffed with billions of lire, they draw the sympathy of the English and of Taf too: as the only cynophobe present I keep my mouth shut. Cruelty for pleasurable ends (shaving pooch and painting his skin bright colours) is one thing, and probably deplorable; keeping a dog on a diet in order that it should provide people with a living is quite another. (Sentimentality about animals is northern and protestant.) The *Observer* gets proprietorial about Adriano – a few minutes after he has flashed his toothless smile Paul adopts him and begins to refer to him as 'Our Peasant'. Welsh cameramen go for action shots of man encouraging dogs. Jane Grigson puts a plastic bag on her head. A and G trek off in different directions – it is evident that their mutual distrust is so great that they have 'planted' truffles that they have already found (at night). This of course is just the thing for the cameras – the crude artifice of what is probably the world's first stage managed truffle hunt produces something that is far more photogenic than the real thing. There is no means (given Adriano's and Giovanni's disinclination to talk about their trade in any but the most general terms) of knowing whether this hillside of oak, acacia and bamboo (whose poles will support vines) is one of those to which they habitually bring their dogs. It is certain though that they would not normally go out in snow – humidity hampers olfactory prowess. The white truffle trade

is altogether a bit of a sham, a harmless one, sure, like the conventions of the press trip, the lobby, the 'quote' and so on. Interest in the species of truffle that grows around Alba was fostered by one Giacomo Morra whose son, an hotelier, is the other claimant to the title Il Re di Tartuffi. Old Morra, in the years after the Second World War, organized the 'truffle fair' and worked hard to establish a national reputation for what had thitherto been a parochial curiosity; then he set about establishing an international reputation for it. His success can be gauged by the attendance at last autumn's truffle fair (which includes prayers for a good harvest) – more than 100,000 came to the town, though quite what the attraction is, is hard to discern; further, the price of these fungi is now that of an expensive drug. First Old Morra and now his son Young Morra have held near monopolies – they simply offer Paul Levy's peasant and all the other hunters more money than they can get elsewhere. (The rival king Sgr Roberto Ponzio is a retailer only – he and his family do not speak to the Morras.) Young Morra (a man in his late fifties actually) inherited from his father not only a happy monopoly but – the smalltown saga thickens – the secret of the brine in which truffles may be preserved without loss of pungency; a few years ago he sold his canning business (but not the brine formula – he still makes it up himself) to Urbani SA in Perugia. It is now alleged that Piedmontese truffles and truffle paste are cut with (inferior) Umbrian produce – the truffle that grows there is of a different species. Oh Alba! Oh Alba indeed – the white truffle is an agreeable enough fungus, absolutely bereft of the versatility of the black Perigord truffle, horribly expensive, vastly over-rated, the object of an enduring gastro-hype. Still things will change: just as the Dogliani brothers now produce good Barolo and Barberra with the aid of modern machinery so does it seem likely that the University of Turin's successful growing of truffles under artificial conditions will be commercially exploited. The future for Adriano may not be too rosy. I fear Mr Levy will have to adopt him for good.

1982

No Ceps Please We're British

There is evidence everywhere of Britain's perennial gastronomic paucity. Try getting a decent meal in a provincial town. Just look at the filth people eat in caffs. Just look at the junk on supermarket shelves. Just look at the pretensions of restaurants with misspelt menus and 'nice' amateur waitresses. Just look at the tweeness of the wretched *Good Food Guide*. And look too at the sheer waste. Of offal. Of those fish, including the marvellous pike which is second only to the salmon among our river fish, which are deemed 'coarse' and so get thrown back by anglers who go home to a 'tea' of fish-fingers. Of fungus. Most of all of fungus.

You'd think that all mushrooms save those in crackly plastic boxes were deadly. You would be wrong. And if you knew what went into mushroom soup, especially into imported mushroom soup . . . What does go into mushroom soup is boletus edulis, aka cèpe, porcini, steinpilz, penny bun. But how many people have heard of the penny bun? The autumnal practice of gathering this and other species of the genus boletus died out long ago among the agrarian working class which, since it has been granted a living wage, has discovered the benefits of Mr Clarence Birdseye's invention. Those whom you find in British woods (if you find anyone) looking for fungi nowadays are more likely to be émigré Poles and Italians, people with earth shoes or middle class francophiles who know boletus edulis by the anglicization of the French name.

That area of France which the British have colonized and renamed the Doordoink, the whole of south west France indeed, abounds in woods where ceps grow, abounds in restaurants where they are served, abounds in chemists' shops

where you can take your trove and have any dubious specimens identified. I used to spend my summers in Bordeaux and at a friend's estate outside that city. There the tenant farmer (shifty, cunning, alcoholic, literally illiterate) showed me where to find ceps – the places where they grew year after year and the *sort of place* where they might grow. Thus he introduced me to what, had he been able to read, he might have known as the mycorrhiza or mycorrhizal relationship; this is simply the symbiosis, the mutual dependence of fungus and, usually, tree (though there are certain fungi that need not concern us here which only grow, for instance, on rotting flesh or on the decaying fruit bodies of other species of fungus, parasites of parasites). His wife, who used sometimes to cook for us, came from Bazas, some 25 miles from where she now lived. She was possessed of what travel writers and local colour merchants call 'a fierce regional pride'; i.e. she was deeply suspicious of anyone not born in Bazas and thoroughly scornful of methods of cooking ceps that did not accord with hers (learned of course from her mother; and the suggestion that the method used in say Carbon Blanc might be as good was tantamount to calling her mother a whore).

The French go in for this in a big way. When they are not actually eating or discussing life and ideas or committing domestic murders they are squabbling about the minutiae of recipes – which I suppose, comes under 'eating' and 'life and ideas' and can often lead to domestic murder. The recipes for cèpes à la Bordelaise are naturally 'definitive' and I hate to think what would have happened had their begetters got together armed with Sabatier knives, kitchen implements and electric carving knives.

But first you have to find your ceps – there are many other species which are edible, though none, I contend, is anywhere near as interesting.

The *truffle* which is found in this country is not the same as that found in Perigord though a family called Collins which lived at Winterslow near Salisbury prospered till the mid-1930s supplying London restaurants with truffles which their pigs hunted in Bentley Woods. *Lactarius deliciosus* grows in

coniferous woods and is probably familiar to anyone who has done much serious eating in Barcelona where it is the invariable accompaniment to small spicy pork sausages – Butifarrones con Revellons. The *Parasol Mushroom* and the *Shaggy Parasol* (Lepiota procera and Lepiota rhadoces) grow in a variety of locations; I have often found the latter in great quantity not far from the church at Stoke Poges where Gray wrote his elegy – this church adjoins, incidentally, a remarkable memorial gardens whose cloistered centrepiece should be visited by anyone with the least interest in the Jekyll sort of garden design and in which various other fungi, including the hallucinogenic *Fly Agaric* (Amanita muscaria), are to be found. The *Chanterelle*, the French girole, occurs in both deciduous and coniferous woods; its culinary properties are, I think, overrated.

The cep, fungal protagonist of this piece, grows in all sorts of woods, especially in their clearings and along their paths and edges. It appears throughout the late summer and the autumn. The conjunction of a long dry spell and a few days' heavy rain is climatically felicitous. Most books will tell you that the season is over by mid-October; most books were written before the change that we have witnessed these last few years whereby summer starts calendrically later and so tends to continue till late September. You can be fairly confident of finding ceps till mid-November.

I don't mind telling you where to find Fly Agarics because I don't use them; I merely look at them, they exert a fascination like that of a brightly banded snake. Their lore is copious and crops up all over the world; their hallucinogenic properties were known immemorially in both the Americas, in India, in France, in Siberia. Methods of preparation varied but it seems that the best results (the most fervid fantasies) were or are obtained by making a paste or soup of the grilled caps, ingesting it, urinating, drinking the urine, urinating and so on. Or: drink the urine of an animal who has eaten one. In Siberia one Fly Agaric was worth a reindeer. Give me a pony and I'll get you one.

I *do* mind telling you where exactly to find ceps. It's not

merely that I am greedy and mean. It's also that the hunt is so much part of the pleasure. As Sacha Distel probably says: 'Ow you say – a cep ees jus' like a woman.' I mean, I might as well simply direct you to the stall at the corner of Long Acre and James Street, outside Covent Garden station where a selection of fungi is sold at preposterous prices. Suffice to say that Burnham Beeches and the Chilterns are good sites and even if you find nothing you'll have had a most pleasant day out. Do not by the way put fungi into plastic bags – use a wicker basket.

It is, I suppose, incumbent upon anyone who writes about the delights of fungi to warn of their dangers or, rather, of the dangers of about ten species, four of which are certainly deadly and the others of which will do you little good. These attack, *inter alia*, the liver, the brain, the circulatory and nervous systems. Nasty. But you do have to be quite uncommonly careless to mistake any of them for those that are worthwhile eating. Eight Germans died last month and one cannot help but suspect that whoever did the cooking was the sort of person who carries an unbroken loaded shotgun over stiles or who plays with unearthed electrical equipment while bathing. Of the genus boletus (from the Greek bolos – clod of earth) most species are almost as good to eat as the true cep and the three which are poisonous (though improbably deadly) do not resemble it. I do not know why the British are so determinedly mycophobic – only the Americans match us; I do know that anyone equipped with a sound guide need not be prey to a most preposterous delusion.

Of the many books on the subject *Collins Guide to Mushrooms and Toadstools* by Morten Lange and F Bayard Hora is perhaps the most useful: its illustrative drawings are well detailed and it will fit into a capacious pocket. *Wild Mushrooms: An Illustrated Handbook* by Linus Zeitmayr (Müller) is a good introduction to the fundaments of mycology but as a guide it is inadequate. *Mushrooms And Other Fungi Of Great Britain And Europe* by Roger Phillips (recently published by Pan) is exhaustively illustrated by photographs which, I think, are never quite as

effective as good drawings; nonetheless, like Mr Phillips's previous volumes on trees, wild flowers etc, it is a sound popular encyclopaedia, decently priced and notably well organized – it has for instance a visual index immediately before the dichotomous keys, and it shows far more species than any other non-specialist work. *Mushrooms, Russia and History* and *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality* are both works of most singular and curious scholarship – an admix of anthropology, mycology and oddball natural history. The former is on the ritual, folkloric and culinary uses of wild mushrooms; the latter is devoted to the Fly Agaric. Their author is a retired New York banker, R Gordon Wasson, a man with a lovely obsession. Jane Grigson's *The Mushroom Feast* is an excellent anthology of recipes and has a fine introduction.

1981

Mycophobia

During an autumn dusk a few years ago I waited for a train at the station in the valley beneath the great dolomitic formation of Montserrat, the plasticity of whose rocks inspired Antonio Gaudi and in whose monastery church is a black virgin. It is a place that promotes wonder. The cable car across the valley to it promotes vertigo. I was suffering from a sort of sensory punchdrunkenness and there was another blow to come. It came in the form of two wizened men who appeared on the platform, each of them carrying a capacious basket, a sort of soft rug, loaded with the fruit bodies of *Lactarius deliciosus*.

They were taking them into Barcelona where they would be sold in the cornucopian market that abuts on the Ramblas and where subsequently they would be eaten, most likely with spiced, uncured pork sausages called 'butifarras'; the conjunction of the two is a common one in Catalonia and is good. Now, what was so striking about these two old men with their mushrooms? Well, obviously any bounty is attractive, more, say than a crop of cultivated fruits; but what, I think, made the sight of them so memorable to me was the fact that no one else on the fairly crowded platform – Franco never did make the trains run on time – found it worth a second glance. You might attribute this to Catalan restraint or you might attribute it to men carrying those fungi being no more unusual in that country than housewives humping packs of fishfingers through Acton or Hackney – something that is taken for granted. Just, in fact, as pyramids of 'fungi porcini' in Turin and fungus identification charts in French chemists and the market devoted to nothing but fungus in

Munich and foraging families in Slovenian woods are taken for granted.

In these mycophobic islands such things are, of course, not taken for granted. If you go down to the woods today you will find very few people indeed looking for mushrooms, and those that you do find will be French or Polish or Italian. Indeed a Lombardian that I know moved out of London to a small town in the Chilterns because the beech woods on the backs of those hills are packed with *fungi porcini* aka cep, cèpe, Steinpilz; he was amazed that such wonderful foodstuff should be left to rot by the British.

Perhaps one should not succumb to meanness, be glad that looking for fungus is not a national preoccupation and that it is only slugs and insects that are liable to beat one in the chase; but that would be to succumb, too, to the dreary conviction that this nation's palate is ineducable, that the meagre culinary vocabulary of its people cannot be boosted. The greater the demand for proper mushrooms the more readily available they'll become; and prices will fall too. As I write Robert Bruce's monopolistic stall in Long Acre is charging £8 per pound for ceps. Next year the price may have risen to £10, and this for something that should be readily available everywhere. Perhaps the time has come to instigate a campaign for real fungus. There is much to be sought and found; just because we have lost touch with that rural tradition that has survived throughout Europe doesn't mean to say that the eternal cycle of strange bodies pushing themselves up through leafmeal has altered one little bit. Into the woods with you.

The contrast with northern Italy could hardly be greater; there severe restrictions are imposed on the gathering of fungi. On certain days it is proscribed altogether, and fungi which is sold in shops has to have a certificate of clearance from the local department of health (such departments must be well staffed or overworked or both). I suppose that it is this business of not wanting to kill yourself that accounts for the fear of fungus, but why should this particular branch of cowardice (or self-preservation) be peculiar to the British? I mean,

Teutonic and Latin nervous systems are just as susceptible to the poisons that certain species secrete. No, there is more to it than mere fear; there is the wasteful philistinism that also informs the national dread of offal and of course, fish (pike are good for burying beneath vegetable patches, that sort of thing); there is also what in mycopsychiatric circles is called pig ignorance. This is the sort of ignorance that explains why the only widely available mushrooms in this country are those small white plastic wrapped things that are grown in disused railway tunnels and such places. These have as much to do with proper mushrooms as wedges of freely sweating soap have to do with cheese.

1982

Colchester's Finest

By one of those circumstantial conjunctions that we in journalism have learned to call ironic – it's ironic that Scrot also scored two own goals *the last time* he visited Villa Park – the effluent that has done for the Whitstable oyster-beds comes from a paper works on the former site of the Rosherville pleasure gardens (prop. Jeremiah Rosher) where in the middle years of the last century oysters were eaten in such numbers that their shells formed vast pyramidal piles, giving the north Kent shore a vaguely funereal aspect. (Mussel shells, black like crows, would have given it a *very* funereal aspect – still, you can't have everything, and after three dozen Whitstables, a gallon of porter and a quick dab with a dolly-mop you were probably in no condition to appreciate your surroundings anyway.)

We all know that in those days oysters were cheap, commonplace – food for everyone. And it is because a copious supply was kept up till the Great War (rather than because of pollution of the sort mentioned above) that the things have subsequently been so rare and expensive; it was over-fishing that did the damage. The same thing is presently happening to salmon, another story.

Now, Whitstables: you can still get them, but they will probably be Colchesters. The point is this: they are both of the same species, *Ostrea edulis*, and take on characteristics (taste, configuration of shell etc) according to where they are raised; here is an instance, doubtless, of protective adaptation, though oysters are not among the molluscs that are supposed to possess this wonderful quality. Presumably since they are sedentary creatures it is reckoned that they will stay put

throughout their lives. Wrong. They are now widely travelled – most Whitstables were, anyway, grown from Breton seed oysters and Christopher Kerrison, who is now the leading ostreiculturist in the Colchester beds, has brought in *Crassotrea gigas*, a native of China and Japan that has also been successfully produced in California. Essex cannot simulate Pacific conditions and so Mr Kerrison uses Loch Ryan above Stranraer to breed these monsters – they are capable of attaining twice the size of *Ostrea edulis*, grow quicker and have shells of a fanciful, over-wrought kind, like those of the species that the French go in for and call Portugaise (the word 'baroque' derives from the Portuguese for a rough shell or misshapen pearl).

Mersea Island, like much of Essex, retains a rurality that many places far further from London have lost. More people work on the land (smallholdings, fruit farms) than in, say, Wiltshire or Gloucestershire; there are few tarted-up houses, lots of unambitious chicken-runs, some slovenly bungalows and seedy coppices with broken huts in them. The estuarial mud is the colour of rat fur. The power-station at Bradwell sits on the other side of the Blackwater, to the north you can see the boorish architect-designed towers of Essex University. It is all rather attractive though. The quality of light that Sunday painters go on about *is* remarkable; the mud-flats at dusk promote luxurious melancholy; the beached boats with people living in them recall those of *David Copperfield* and Robert Hamer's film *The Long Memory*. The place is long on atmosphere. Colchester Oyster Fishery's place is no less odd than the rest, but smarter. It is big, wooden, new, New English looking, in what was called the Stick Style. It overlooks Pyefleet Channel, home of what are, according to Alan Davidson (*North Atlantic Seafood*) the most famous Colchesters. A century ago 1,000 men worked these beds and there was a full-time police-force of twelve men to prevent thefts. Now ten men are employed here and Christopher Kerrison says thefts are scarce – it is a specialized sort of poaching; cold, wet, uncomfortable. Nonetheless one does hear stories of locals

with extraordinarily large 'whelks' for sale at knock-down prices.

Mr Kerrison, a sometime racing driver, bought the lease to these beds in the middle Sixties. They were in a poor state after the winter of 1962–3 when the Colne estuary froze over and the ice had to be dynamited to allow ships passage up-river to Wivenhoe and Colchester. They are evidently prospering now and the company supplies more or less every fish restaurant in London, and places in Lille, Hamburg, Brussels etc. Mr Kerrison is however not satisfied; although he sells as much as he can produce (and looks v. hale from eating what he produces), he wants to 'arouse interest in shellfish'. Hence my visit. The trouble is, my interest was aroused when I first ate oysters (St-Brieuc, short trousers) and, like that of most heterosexual men and lesbian women, it has gone on being aroused. Trying to get an oyster hater to try the things is like, well, trying to train a seal to eat tripe; the effort will go unrewarded. And I suspect that trips around the oyster farm (0206 38 4141) will make few converts. But it is game of Mr Kerrison to try, and those who already like the taste of the sea (*that's it*) will find the jag most pleasurable, and so too, I guess, will those who are interested in sex changes – oysters are in a state of perpetual mutation. A year to the day before I went to Mersea I was at Hay-on-Wye with April Ashley. What does this mean? Is it *ironic*? Where will I be next year? More to the point – will it be Joanie or Jeanette Meades who bids you adieu in the near but unforeseeable future?

1983

Meat On Canvas (1)

Jesus Christ is the food that is most often represented in western art. Calling Him the Lamb doesn't make the eucharist any the less cannibalistic. It's a *man's* body and blood that Christians eat. This elemental meat is shown us at many stages of its development: The first is when it's a babe, when it is indeed lamb, or veal or sucking pig. There follow childhood, miracles, feasts, trials, calumnies, betrayals. The greatest image though is when it's dead, when it's a casualty that has died for our plates, when it's a bull that has undergone the physical change that makes it beef, when it's a pig that has undergone the change that makes it pork. Calvary was an abattoir. The last stage is when it is bread and wine – or, in the case of the artotyrites, bread and cheese – when, anyway, it is no longer recognizable as the creature save by faith in trans-substantiation.

Now, with other meats, more literal meats, the central and most potent image in that progress is missing. Painting that shows the killing of animals for human consumption is not a genre – there is not a word for it: slaughterscape, still death, conversion piece . . . None of these is currency. And hunting scenes are not primarily concerned with the death of the prey, let alone with its evisceration and preparation for the market. Of course there are films like Georges Franju's *La Sang Des Bêtes* which show the horror of abattoirs, but their concern and effect is to hit the senses rather than to preach. They are not works of vegan propaganda. Jesus's death is crucial to the Christian mystery, to its morbidity and pathos. It must not be forgotten. The death of calves and of pigs shrieking as they try to keep their foothold is simply not part of the tradition of

alimentary art. And that tradition has other laws, other proscriptions which are adhered to as much by the photographer as by the painter. The link between beast and stew is bridged by a neat ellipsis.

Take a bull. Call him Hamlet, not after the Dane from the problem family, but after his dad who was Dublin District Milk Board's most prolific sire, an Aberdeen Angus with 75,000 offspring. That Hamlet died in 1977 and was made into dog meat. Our Hamlet is destined for human consumption, not for bovine generation and canine delight. His nativity will not be recorded – we don't want to be reminded of the vulnerability and cuteness of future meat. And no one will snap the moment when he is about to be led into a windowless building and he glances a pair of eyes through the slats of a cattle truck and recognizes them as those of his father who was forced to give him life so he'd have an early death. No, not that sort of stuff. No, what suits next is the triumphal pastoral. This is where Hamlet, full grown and in the flush of early manhood – which is the only manhood he'll get – is found in a field with a famous chef. The weather is great. There are lots of variables: the landscape may be fell or fen; there can be trees – anything but species like the stone pine or the cypress which are suggestive of parched rather than of lush ground; houses are OK so long as they're yeoman vernacular or grand, and farm buildings have got to be old ones – no metal sheds no matter how gleamy they may be, no silage towers. Cars are Range Rover, not greedy farmer Volvos and Mercs parked in front of rancho bungalows. There can be a farmer provided he's got outdoorsy clothes. The chef is got up for the country too, and of course what he's doing is inspecting his raw materials on the hoof the way an agent of murder meets his victim before he puts out a contract. He's claiming Hamlet's life with a gingerly made pat to the flank. The next time we see Hamlet he has shrunk, he has changed shape and colour, he has stopped being a quadruped. The chef has put on new clothes, white for absolution – but anyway, it wasn't him, *he* didn't give Hamlet the old volt jolt, did he? The sun's gone in too. These suns you see were brought along and lugged in by

the photographer's assistant. No landscape – everything's tempered metal now, blades and flame. Chef is making his first incision, he's a surgeon and an artist. And we only know that these lumps of amputee used to fit together to make Hamlet because we are told so.

Often we won't see Hamlet in the field; often the story begins posthumously, with no reference to the life save in terms of the sort of pasture where it was led, maybe. And absolutely no reference to the death. Often Hamlet, who of course won't have a name – you don't give names to dark red cushions with wax spilled on them – often he'll be in a state of very quick metamorphosis, bumping through a serial Hell of mallets and blades and hot boxes and drownings.

To a point, food art – whatever the medium – is an expiation of our bad feelings about what we eat. The more noble the beast the deeper our atonement – you don't get photos of famous chefs patting potatoes, you do get photos of big time vignerons with their hands round bunches of grapes. In the leguminous, fructuous hierarchy the grape is a lord; the potato is a serf. Also, spuds aren't sexy: Bacchanalia have no use for these roots. And even if Bacchanalia had been a common genre when potatoes came to Europe they'd still have had no use for them. Grapes are different. They are forever shown in conjunction with breasts, they are synecdoche of breasts, they are metaphorical promises of the mother's milk, vinous analogues of lactic splendour etc.

We could go on linking the gustatory to the sacramental. But though we recognize the symbolism and understand the iconography of representations of food because of Christianity's ubiquity and its impingement on our minds, we live in an age when overtly religious art is not much made. Nevertheless we can't avoid seeing its shadow cast over the secular and the utile and the fancifully decorative. But it is no more than a shadow that we see. Our increased secularity has coincided with, has perhaps even occasioned the end of the painted still life of food. And the photography that is now abundantly practised hasn't the weight of association of the painting it vainly tries to replace. It means nothing outside itself.

Loss of meaning is manifest in the death of ritual – no one says grace any more. Ritual is not a cosmetic. It is a means of transportation to sublimity and awe. Without it the multiplicity of responses to food vanishes. Food is reduced to fuel. I believe the current preoccupation with effortfully gimmicky photographs of food is an attempt to regain some sort of meaning, to invest food with a new set of non-nutritional properties. The properties I'm talking about are banally temporal ones – they're concerned with status, social placement and so on. Food has become chic, it's an OK subject. The food photography in the glossy magazines and the colour supplements and the specialist magazines is ineffably vulgar and manages to disassociate posh eating from the notions of glut and excess: it invariably shows food that is cooked to be photographed. The tyranny of the visual over the gustatory suits the English very well: the English suffer, as we all know, a collectively defective palate and a sense of embarrassment about eating well. If food can be made to look so nice, why, then it can be counted a decorative art, and to taste it must be a quasi-aesthetic experience, quite as intellectually demanding and emotionally trying as an interior by John Fowler or a design by Cecil Beaton.

As a result of the efforts of the food photographers who see themselves as the heirs to Arcimboldo and Miro and god knows which minor Nip print makers chefs have submitted to the dictates of art direction. They make food which is to be looked at. It is *not* sustaining. They talk about presentation, *all the time*, believe me, they do. High cooking is not something you eat and are thankful for, it is not celebratory of nature's fecundity. It is like a disposable and expensive accoutrement, a prop to what we must call a lifestyle. A Rolex Oyster that you swallow.

1986

Meat On Canvas (2)

When Claude Chabrol's film *Le Boucher* opened in this country one critic, presumably Francophobe, certainly ignorant, commented that the director signalled the titular character's capacity for evil by having him finish off his soup by pouring a glass of wine into it and drinking the resultant broth straight from the bowl. The facts of the matter are, of course, that Chabrol is a native of Perigord where this practice is commonplace and that it signals no more than the start of the meal proper – soup being considered literally hors d'oeuvres. Moreover, this practice is known as *faire chabrot* or, more rarely, *faire chabrol*: Chabrol enjoys his little jokes and here is one on his name, no more, no less. The lesson is clear – unless we wish to present ourselves as dunces we should beware of ascribing particular meanings to the representation of food and drink in cultures that we don't understand. The idea of universality is at best dubious and in matters of the table quite inapposite; and it is especially difficult (and presumptuous) for the British to apply their standards to other countries for there are few other countries in which food and drink are so peripheral to the general culture: only tea, beer, beef and fish and chips have held anything approaching a central position in these islands in this century and despite the evidence of gastronomic magazines they probably maintain their paramouncy. Maybe they've been joined by burgers; maybe roast beef is on the wane in the collective conscious as it is on the dining table – but I doubt it, the collective conscious is a tenacious beast. It clings on to ideas even when they are based in folk myth rather than actuality, perhaps *because* they are based in folk myth which is set firm in the recent past and is thus easier to cope with than the fluid,

elusive present. It is, pace L P Hartley and that silly film, the *present* which is a foreign country, not the past which is well mapped. The English attitude to food in different parts of the past can be discerned in the work of various painters. The attitude that was till recently prevalent (and, as I say, perhaps still is) was of protestant distaste, of mistrust of culinary art, of the appreciation of that only half accurately entitled phenomenon called 'good plain cooking', of self-congratulatory frugality, of xenophobia, of guarded and rare admission of the 'slap-up' treat, of – and this is fundamental – embarrassment. The meagreness of all this is amply evident in the work of a social realist such as Harold Gilman. Now, admittedly Gilman was a socialist herbivore (he lived part of his life at Letchworth during the years when that town was 'dry') and admittedly he was not a rich man, but his implicit association of anything that is edible or potable with tedium and drabness is above and beyond what might be occasioned by the circumstances of a life such as his. What I mean is that Gilman's art unwittingly distils the archetypical British attitudes I just mentioned. His lonely figures, victims of circumscribed lives led in dreary rooms, sit rueing the hand that chance has dealt them off the bottom of the pack and gaping at brown tea pots and chipped mugs, or stoking themselves – they eat with no delight, they eat as though they begrudge the time taken over the whole sullying process. Gilman was not merely an illustrator but in his paintings, and those of the British realist tradition, food is no more than a prop, an indication of class status, an objective correlative. I can think of no British painter, realist or otherwise, who has a) described the essence, the quiddity of food or b) has done anything transcendent with it as subject matter; and it's not just painting, there is little in British art of any sort which treats gastronomy seriously. The gluttonscapes of a film such as *Tom Jones* certainly don't; the pretentious restaurant as location is simply invertedly Gilmanesque; the tripe and cowheel stuff in *Walter Greenwood* is local colour. Another Lancastrian, Anthony Burgess, is however unencumbered by our national dread of the stomach and tongue: that he is a catholic and an expatriate no doubt have much to do with it – in his 1966 novel *Tremor of Intent* the

sensual equation between eating and making love is properly made, that's to say it is made in earnest and without sniggering. Perhaps no one but a catholic, or a product of catholicism (which is probably the same) can do this. The eucharist is ritual cannibalism, food and wine are sacred . . . it is no coincidence that protestant countries are the ones that eat badly. Look at a painting by Gilman's contemporary Picasso. *Blind Man's Meal* (1903, 'blue period') is an explicit title which does not begin to hint at the rawness and potency of the composition it's attached to. It is, certainly, socially acute in that it is graphically demonstrative of the wretchedness that accrues from blindness, indigence and malnourishment – but so is, say, *Hamlet* a socially acute play: the important point is that Picasso's painting goes beyond the socially and economically illustrative into a realm of pain and awe and sanctity. It is about very primitive things. It is stripped down. It concerns itself with elemental senses – touch, sight, taste – by its concentration on lack and absence. Its depictions of hunger and thirst say more about the importance of nourishment than any number of groaning tables. The painting possesses a beady candour and unsentimental pathos. Now, it may not be 'fair' to invoke such a master as Picasso, especially not the Picasso of that epoch when he was at the height of his powers. But I am citing him not because he was a supremely gifted maker of paintings but because he was an exemplar of an artistic tradition – I'm talking here about subject and attitude to subject – which mirrors the centrality that food and the table have in the cultures which nurture that tradition. (No doubt the critic who mistook Chabrol's jest for an essay in character-delineation would reckon the blind man a bit of a no-good because he has no knife, no fork and clearly eats bread without buttering it: that would be another misreading.) The line to which *Blind Man's Meal* and *The Frugal Repast* and Picasso's numerous kindred works of the first half decade of this century belong is one that treats food with reverence and humility, as something hard earned, as something whose source is in the earth and in creatures. The link between what is on the plate and that food's fructuous life or its days on the hoof, that link is always there. Just as there is a willingness on the part of

many southern European artists to treat food 'head on' so are they bereft of the squeamishness which informs both the protestant kitchen and northern foodscapes. The truth is that many still lives are still deaths – the pheasant that flew into a firing squad, the salmon that got a spike through its lower lip, the thigh of the bull whose last sight of daylight was outside an abattoir; *nature mort* is the apter term, it isn't euphemistic, it isn't trying to hide something. What the English locution hides, because it occludes the matter of its subjects' demise, is the fact that food wasn't always food. The pheasant was a rather stupid bird leading a blameless life in that wood or this, the salmon was a lovely tyro dolphin, leaping and glinting like pearl, and the bull was something to avoid, a bellowing danger. You can bet they never guessed the fate that would befall them. A still life of yet to be cooked stuff mediates between field and table, between river and stove; it captures a moment in the transformational process called cooking, the process that makes bull beef. The contrary pole to that of squeamishness is the sadistic carnagescape of an artist such as François Bonvin who clearly revelled in the suffering inflicted on animals on the point of being animals no more and becoming food; this man loved blood, or at least he loved to paint it. We don't need to go so far as he did. But the southern tradition is salutary when it's more moderate: it joins man to the world by reminding him that he is, like it or not, part of a great and organic system. What he eats, what he lives on, actually comes from somewhere. The English paradox is that we have for years eaten poorly while taking food for granted. This self-congratulatory defeatism is, thankfully, on the wane. But it won't have had its day till food attains a central position in the collective conscious, a position which will be confirmed when unacknowledged legislators of one kind and another start coming to terms with food as a subject worthy for serious art – n.b. *serious*.

1987

CAMKAM: The Campaign for Keg and Musak

Neville Trevor has such a hefty measure of lime in his lager that when he leans over you to say something his breath smells like a powerful disinfectant, one that gets right round the bend or – as he would have it – right up your nostrils. Many things get up Neville's sprucely coiffed nostrils but none gets so far up (as far, say, as the maxillary sinus) as what has happened to his local in the last five or so years. You might know the place. It is in Fulham, it is big and it is in a style that you might call Brewer's Boastful. It was almost certainly built in the 1880s and outside it is a rather indiscriminate salad of motifs and materials – a Flemish touch here, a terracotta relief there, some tile hanging, lots of brick and bevelled glass. The effect is busy and loud. Inside it is like that too, though here all the Victoriana is new and the wood has the lustreless quality characteristic of cheap repro. The lights look as if they have come from Christopher Wray's and the abundant columns have been rather ineptly marbled. Neville doesn't much like it. That's an understatement.

'It's a right toss, isn't it? You ask for a lager and lime and a rum and black for the bird in 'ere now and some wally 'as to shove 'is 'and in front 'is face stop 'isself laughing. It's a fair choker. I been comin' in 'ere since I was fifteen. It was great. Great lot o' lads. Some very tasty white meat. Got some right boilers too mind you. But it was great. First time I 'eard Telstar was on the jukebox. Gone now.' Neville then surprised me by humming the late Joe Meek's excellent record in such a way as to suggest that he had an invisible comb and sheet of Bronco in front of his mouth. 'Trick I learned from a bird in Jersey,' he explained. At 8.30 on a very cold Wednesday night

the place was doing good business. There was a big open fire and a crowd of youngish people of the *Guardian* reading class was gathered round it – most of them dingily dressed, some in Michelin man anoraks. There was no music and Neville was feeling chippy. The dreadful winter weather may have brought out the Dunkirk spirit and so on in everyone else but it had made Neville even more pissed off than usual. The trouble is this: Neville feels a stranger in his own manor.

He claims that he was named after Neville Brand, an American film actor of the 40s and 50s with a notably bad complexion. 'Sixth most decorated US soldier of World War Two,' he said with brusque pride. And he has fittingly belligerent ideas, eg, Northern Ireland: 'We got the bomb, ain't we. Use it. No prisoners taken.' But this wasn't why I had come to talk to him. I had come to talk to him about CAMKAM, the organization that he has founded in conjunction with his longtime friend Trevor Neville. (By a singular appellative coincidence these two boys, whose names are the reverse of the other's, found themselves in the same class at the age of 11 and have been friends ever since.) We were still waiting for Trevor to turn up when Neville got started.

'Wasn't so bad to begin wiv. You know. Just the odd wally come in off the street; all very meek like, askin' if there's beer from the wood. *Beer from the wood.* Sounds like Teddy Bear's bleeding picnic, dunnit. Honest, tell you the truth, the guvnor we 'ad then – he didn't know what they was on about. After about five of 'em come in he rung up the brewers and they tell him it's this CAMRA lot but 'e's a bit mutt'n'jeff and he fink they tell 'im *camera*. Well, 'e wasn't too quick, old Ed – he went ten rounds with Ron Barton back in '58 and ain't been the same since. Next time one o' these geezers come in he ask 'im what he want to take a photo of. No kiddin'. Anyway then we gets a new guvnor and before you know it they got this real ale from down in Sussex or somewhere. You never tasted anyfink like it – flat an' warm. But that's not what it's about. Instead o' just one wally you get whole bleedin' carloads of 'em. Not a bint among 'em; well, if you're lucky they've got one bint who's dressed like a hoddie, no

make-up and bleedin' great clodhopperin' boots. And they just stand there. They hardly drink the stuff. Fuckin' Sir Anthonies, they just stand there and *talk* about it and sniff at it like they was sniffin' roses. Takes 'em about half an hour to drink a pint. You never see any of 'em hit the floor.'

'That's right,' said Trevor Neville who had joined us, nodding contemptuously, 'they're anti-life. They want to turn boozers into morgues. They're puritans.' Unlike Neville Trevor, Trevor Neville is white collar or at least whiteish. He has a clerical job with a hire firm and some after-hours 'outside interests'; Neville Trevor is a carpenter. They liked their pub when it had a carpet (maroon on maroon), round tables with an aggressively shiny veneer, plenty of formica panelling, constant musak, pressurized beer and so on. Now there is sawdust on the floor, there are lumpen pseudo-rustic tables and chairs ('nothing to sink yer bum into'), all the repro panelling I referred to above, half a dozen 'real ales'. And there is no musak, no jukebox. The place has, if you like, been subjected to the same process as the area in which it is situated, i.e. it has been gentrified, done over in the way the middle class approves of. (I am talking about that section of the middle class which uses 'middle class' as a term of abuse.)

It is in reaction to this new orthodoxy that Neville Trevor and Trevor Neville have founded CAMKAM – the Campaign for Keg and Musak, though really their aims go beyond those indicated by the acronym. They want to make pubs come alive again. They want them to be once more a haven for people wearing really tight cheesecloth shirts and denim loons. They want to bring back the days when a bloke could talk with unalloyed pride of his admiration for Alan Minter and Dennis Waterman, flog a dodgy jamjar, eat a handsome meal of one smokey bacon and one cheese and onion, speculate on England's chances of getting to the '74 World Cup, tap a platform sole in time with Slade, pull a scrubber and take her home in an L registration Cortina. Just like CAMRA, CAMKAM wants to dredge up the past, albeit a more recent chunk of it.

Neville points out that: 'Half the CAMRA wallies can't tell the difference between the real stuff and the other anyway.

They just like to *think* they can. Snobbery's what it's all about'. As someone who doesn't much like beer of either sort I am indifferent to both organizations though I do agree with Neville Trevor and Trevor Neville about music in pubs. A good jukebox playing 'White Light, White Heat' at full volume is just the thing to block out the ghastly noise of whining voices comparing specific gravities and dropping the names of obscure breweries.

1982

Line 'Em Up Gary: The Iconography Of The Lager Advert

Elide lager and ad. Come on, squire, mate, john, shove 'em together – lager and ad. And what do you get, guv? You get *lad*. We're talking here, evidently, about the elision that occurs after you've sunk a few, when you're wiped out, arseholed, badered, skinned. There are more synonyms for drunk than there are for any other word in English, more even than for copulation. The magnitude of drunkenness's synonymic attraction is variously attributable. I suggest – and this may, of course, be taproom counsel – that this plethora of words is due to slang's being a form of competition: the invention of words that die after an evening or (rarely) pass into nether-language is a means of showing off. And though, yes, copulation at its basest may be exhibitionistic it is not to be interrupted by either party for the sake of a neologism. Drinking with the lads, on the other hand, is a race. Who can down most, who can boast biggest – who has screwed most, who's driven quickest (both activities famously, mortally, impaired by the current agent of verbosity), who's been the first to clock a C-registration write-off, who's got the smartest new word for the state he's in. In this laddish world of lager and smokey bacons women are there to nag and to chat up, that's all. *Real* drinking is something done by men, in sodality (team spirit is the common bond of the individually bereft), in pubs. And the theme of lads' pubs is – to précis a Michael Heath cartoon – drunkenness. The ads of course don't show this bit; no one is seen to throw up on Holstein, to chuck ralph on Harp. What they show is cockiness, savvy, 'discernment' (the ability to distinguish one can of fizzy filth from another), 'street-wisdom'. These are the attributes to be gained from

drinking the filth, that's the message. The trouble is, it's true. The gap between the 30 second cartoons and an evening in many urban pubs is temporal, not qualitative. You may not actually find the ursine yob from the Hofmeister films in Hackney or Isleworth but you will find banally flashy berks just like him talking about the poe'ry of Glenoddle, nudging each other when they spot a real goer across a berg of spent cans, conversing in catch phrases (caught from the ads, often as not). Ad and world are mutually reflective, equally gross, further, they spill out of their confines, contaminate proximate territories – 'popular' telly is peopled by lager-apes, which doesn't matter since we can button-punch it into oblivion. But it does matter that these loud and gregarious beasts carry pubs like invisible carapaces – they turn trains into pubs, and beaches and innocent pavements and once pleasant parks; their lout-imperialism is boundless.

A Drink in a Public House

'Drink' has signified alcoholic beverage as well as something taken merely to assuage thirst since the Middle Ages. 'Public House' is of more recent origin; it has become an increasing misnomer since it achieved currency round the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As a building type the inn or tavern is much, much older, of course: but think about the misnomer; consider the effects (behavioural, tectonic, victualling) that this wrong name has had down the years; believe that a signifier can shape its referent; remember, tradition can be a persistent bully. What I mean is this: were pubs called bars or taps and had they been habitually called thus they would have engendered a different and, maybe, happier culture. Public house is an oxymoron; a house is, characteristically, private. It is inward-looking, confined. I find it difficult to discount the notion that an echo of this half remembered privacy and a shadow of the equivocation implicit in the double-barrelled handle are sensed by everyone who has anything to do with the places – as punter, publican, designer, child left outside. It is from the half-memory of *someone*'s house, opened for other people in return for money

as much as from the exigencies of climate (the outward-looking café exists in far less moderate climates than Britain's) that the shapes of pubs evolved. Even those pubs which least resemble a private house – mock Flemish gin palaces of the 1880s and 90s, suburban 'roadhouses' of the 1930s – were divided in a manner that was, certainly, hierarchical but also *homely* in varying degrees. The invitation to 'public' behaviour was greatest in the public bar and decreased through saloon, private, snug and so on. Even though such divisions have largely disappeared in an access of brewers' egalitarianism the ambiguity remains; the tension between public and domestic mores is still there, though pubs increasingly seem reduced to houses whose occupants are keen to trash them. But even when the places aren't full of oiks or hoorays the standard of domestic life that is parroted is a meagre one: smalltalk with the publican, jokes which may be comforting in their familiarity, the easily generous gesture of a drink bought for the guvnor's missis, the ribbing of 'Old' so and so, those bloody catch phrases . . . All the *mannerisms* of domestic life are present, but none of its density is. The faint pretence that pubs are houses promotes behaviour notably different to that found in, say, Scottish bars or French cafés. There is no confusion between bar and home, between café and home; the English sham of host and guest does not come into play. The relationship is straightforwardly commercial – you pay, I give you a drink and a lease on a seat for so many minutes. The English are chronically awkward, even ashamed about both giving and receiving service (it is not for nothing that this country's restaurants are staffed by Spaniards and Italians). This awkwardness informs all pub life and seems also to infect wine-bars, in which you can at least sit without difficulty but which are otherwise all too much akin to pubs – they have even fostered their own identifiable sub-group, potential students of which should head to Bristol, wine-bar capital of Britain.

The Only Good Pub's A Bad Pub

The good thing about 'bad' pubs is that they are adjudged bad by habitual pub users and are thus free of such people. The

bad thing about 'good' pubs is the presence of those very same people. There used, in that area of West London bordered by Shepherd's Bush and Brook Greens, by Holland Road and Hammersmith Road – an area which is aptly nameless – to be a barn-like place whose interior was furnished with folding trestle tables and folding chairs. It offered draught or bottled Guinness, bitter, a choice of three brands of whiskey and perhaps four of whisky. That's all. There was no music, very little conversation. Nothing ever happened. No one took any notice of his fellow customers. The air was moiré with the smoke of Sweet Aftons and Majors. The walls were hospital cream. It was perfectly restful, passively anti-social. It was the antithesis of those places to which bods make special trips – 'I know this great boozer out near Henley/down in the Isle of Dogs. The winter-warmer's *fan*tastic/apparently the Krays used to drink there.' No, it was nothing like that, it was simply a place in which you could sit with a drink, read, muse without interruption, without self-consciousness. It was nothing like any house I've ever known. The atmosphere was close to that of the reading room of a dim suburban library, it was that sort of refuge. Now it's a free house with 'real' ale, 'genuine' sawdust, 'traditional' settles and, no doubt, authentic bores who know about specific gravities, malting and hops. Its fate has been ignominious; I think the Brewery Tap next to Salisbury bus station came off better – it was demolished. Its customers comprised reckless teenagers and wrecked winos. There were benches, no tables, a bar with barrels of scrumpy on it. The brewery whose 'tap' it was was a quarter of a mile away, keeping its distance as one might from a wayward infant that has grown into a scrofulous adult. The scrumpy hurt, it numbed, it promoted momentary volubility, subsequent catalepsy.

What these disappeared places had in common with each other (and, perhaps, with the bars of Roman Glasgow) was not so much a witting shamelessness as an innocence of wickedness. They were untouched by the accusatory finger of Protestantism. The Prod ideal is probably teetotal: Sir Titus Salt exhorted his workers at Saltaire thus: 'Abandon beer, all

ye that enter here' – it was inscribed above the entrance to the model village; Letchworth was dry for many years. And if alcohol is tolerated it must be regulated (licensing hours) and its places of consumption both hidden to the world (hence the inward-looking neurosis) and dressed up as something *gemütlich*, hearthy. 'Dressed up' is the key. There are still rare houses which are public – and they seem nothing like pubs; they don't encourage the gregariousness and dismal bonhomie of pubs. There's one at Ashleworth, on the Severn downstream from Tewkesbury. It is simply somebody's house in which one room and a bit of the garden are open to whoever shows up. Thankfully not many do. It does, or certainly did, poor business. With its crummy furniture, old (but not yet fashionable) peanut adverts, limited choice of drinks, and river midges, it missed quaintness by a mile, it was no one's idea of a 'country pub'. I hope it's still that way.

Places like those instanced – one in London, one in a country town, one in the boondocks – must make brewers wince. They'll go fast if they've not already gone, the way that the railway carriage and self-built sheds of the plotlands have gone. And they'll never be revived: neo-no-hoper doesn't sound much of a style, does it? Me, I'll stay at home.

Guiltless Palaces

A bearded bore (a comprehensive teacher with obligatory CND badge, actually) recently boasted to a friend of mine that the newly fashionable north east London suburb where he lives is full of 'unbelievable boozers that stay open till two, some of them *three* in the morning'. Hay on Wye, the unofficial loony bin on the Marches, is like that too, and so, no doubt, are countless other burghs. Men in deafening Taiwan plaid trews hauling malformed shopping trolleys talk leeringly about the 'nineteenth hole'. 'Medicine' is a popular euphemism for spirits. Whether inside or outside the law the consumption of alcohol in these islands seems to occasion covertness, furtiveness; it is as though an extra-alcoholic element makes the business of getting drunk that much more thrilling; it is as though we all secretly want to be secret drinkers. Guilt is the

special and ubiquitous chaser to all our drinks – we need to kid ourselves that we're really rather daring . . .

This current crop of cocktail-pubs or whatever they're called will fail, as their predecessors did, for the very reason that all those nursery coloured concoctions and 'exotic' stage-sets make the process of intoxication so *easy*, such comfortable fun. Your hardened lad doesn't want to get legless in a crèche.

1985

Street Creda: Would You Buy A New Stove From Jimmy Greaves?

There is nothing startling about Jimmy Greaves advertising stamina pills, about Emlyn Hughes advertising trainers. The conjunction of peddler and product forms, in each case, a straightway identifiable cliché to anyone who can recall: that before Greaves was a paid up man of the people he was a rehabilitated drunk; a drunk; a man who actually *played* football; that before Hughes and his voice achieved a residency on the lowest IQ show on telly they too had done a spot out there on the park. These clichés belong to the uncomplicated world of endorsement: we were all going to play inside forward for England once, and that fantasy was buttressed by wearing, say, a Billy Wright shirt and Brian Douglas boots; and if you're a pot-belly old enough to be Gary Lineker's father who turns out on Sunday mornings you can still dream your dreams in the mud – infantile fantasy in an adult is not mitigated by the impossibility of its achievement.

These clichés also belong to an early stage of Hughes's and Greaves's 'fame', to that stage where they are still millstoned by their association with a specific sort of endeavour. The Creda campaign they're involved in now exploits and honours and establishes beyond all doubt the lads' leap from the particular (activity born) area of celebrity into its fecund generality (which is character-based). Well, perhaps *character* is overdoing it, maybe cartoon-based is apter; but they are still, in terms of 'identification' and so on, *characters*. Greaves and Hughes have undergone nomenclatural metamorphoses – nowadays they're Greavesie and Em; and they're kitted out with whole wardrobes of one dimensional mannerisms, catch-phrases, tics, giggles. They're over that embarrassing hurdle

before reaching which the putative celeb has to be identified by a caption ('Nigel Dempster') or, worse, a qualified caption ('Nigel Dempster, gossip columnist and friend of the Royal Family'). The lads are faces now – which means that they're good for flogging something more than designer jockstraps. The pool of such characters is finite, and so, you might have thought, are the items with which they are associable. In the normal run of things Greavesie would have been a cert for lager propaganda, but the last thing that manufacturers of alcohol want is an alcoholic, present or past. But that still leaves cars, power tools, axes, that sort of thing – men's things, the sort of things that rough diamonds know all about.

What Creda has done is to play on what everybody knows, that the rough diamond is really an achiever-lout – a male supremacist whose domestic abilities include vomiting, falling downstairs, going to sleep on the sofa, generally apeing the mores of the oafs who inhabit the land of sit-com. *They* think that we love to hate them, what we know is that we simply hate them and their 'streetwise' laddishness and their pride in their low cunning and their blokeish bonhomie and fund of jokes and lowest common denominator angle on the world – i.e., that life runs on 'drinks'. These heroes of the alternative economy are supposed to share one further trait – pathological homophobia.

And part of the received wisdom of the homophobe is that cooking and washing are done by women and if not by women by benders, *in aprons*. The only part of the culinary process which, in this neanderthal code, a man may partake of without threat to his sexual identity is carving – an act whose correspondences and associations are patent: the warrior, the hunter, the defender of family etc. To get Jimmy Greaves into an apron, even if he is royally *burning cakes*, achieves several ends. It suggests to your average bloke that he too could get caught out looking a real nance unless he buys the old lady a Creda; it tells him (forget the copy, look at the photo) that the cooker is such that the old lady will stay glued to it from joy and never let him near it (thus giving him more time to sink Hofmeister in front of the telly). Further, it

emphasizes the sexual division of domestic roles in such a way as to both re-establish the trad order and hint at a role mobility within that norm: there's a familial analogy here of the larger, social re-establishment of class as a ladder which is fixed, and that to climb or descend it will not affect its essence. This is an advertisement that would have been unlikely to appear a decade ago.

As well as Greaves and Hughes a couple of other members of the sodality of blokes have taken Creda's penny or pony or gorilla or whatever. With Fred Housego disqualified because he's back driving his cab, and Benny Green out of the running because he says he can read and write, and Alex Higgins precluded by his sexiness the gigs have gone to Derek Jameson and Eric Bristow. The smartest thing Bristow ever did was adopt the moniker Crafty Cockney – it's equally applicable to Greaves and Jameson. The greatest editor the *Sun* never had appears in a scene of mock-sophisticated bathos, unable, poor clot, to roast a chicken on the left hand page and saved in this pre-seduction task (there is Moet on ice and a pre-tied bow tie) on the right hand page by a microwave. The fact that Jameson, holding the roast bird on a spit and smiling oafishly, looks like a waiter on the point of pyrotechny only adds to the incongruity: it achieves the same level of naturalism as a star-vehicle panto. A bloke is ever a bloke, immutable; he's bound to bungle the seduction, and we know that Jameson isn't *really* going to start cooking. There is safety in blokes, you know where you are with them, you can take a rise out of them – Creda: Science for *Woman*kind. The message is one of dim collusion, of a truce in what was once called the battle of the sexes. It's as sentimentally partial as those recollections of the Great War which grant primacy to football games in no-man's-land and erase from memory the carnage, the consequent ossuaries.

1986

Whiff Of Danger: Smell, Pull, Come

The formula is almost invariable: a setting that connotes elegance or sophistication or one of those things you get in mini-series and soaps; an aspirantly imperious young woman with big hair and four figure threads; a man who is good looking in the way that paroled sadists who've spent too much money on Armani and scalp culture are good looking. And, if it's on telly, the voice speaking the copy will almost certainly be a man's.

The fragrance industry should be a gift to the advertising. Here is a product that apes adverts themselves – all style and no content, maximum packaging and minimum gift. Scent should be – to magimix some similes – a clean slate that's a springboard for the finely tuned, finely paid minds of soi-disant creatives. But all they can come up with is sex and money, the promise of (at best) seduction in ersatz palatial surrounds.

I say seduction at best because the message of quite a few of the current crop is one of rape – not, of course, the banal actuality, but the fantasy of the higher porn; the stuff Helmut Newton has given his name to.

Newton's Law, which all creatives adhere to, has disturbing affinities with the thinking of the people who commit the act for real: it is, simply, that women are asking for it, that they are begging the carnal attentions of men in general. It is a sub-CSE notion, genuinely and dangerously stupid and it fends off its critics by portraying only powerful looking dominatrix types.

This world admits no humour: Newton's photographs and scent adverts may be laughable but they're not wittingly

funny. There is, necessarily, no humour in pornography because humour undermines fantasy, acts as a link with the real. There's no denying the potency of perfume as an agent of sexual attraction, and adverts have long played on this – Tabu has flogged litres of its sweetish scent by associating it with a turn of the century genre illustration of a rapturous embrace between a full skirted beauty and, the taboo object, a hired violinist, a below-stairs violator.

And before Brut employed locker-room guys like Our 'Enery and little Kevin Keegan in a covert admission that all it was really good for was expunging the smell of sweat it used to use the line: 'For after shave. After shower. After anything.'

But these ads were characterized by what now seems a certain innocence. The hard core joylessness is a product of the last few years; it coincides with the invasion of the fragrance industry by big name garment traders – Yves and Paco and Lagerfelt: no group of people takes itself more seriously than frivolous artisans. The swaggering vapidity of the rag trade is now writ large all over scent ads.

The gulf between ad and point of sale remains, however, hearteningly wide – which is not the case with clothes. The eternally resting actresses (with make-up determined by their interpretation of an *ingénue* role in a now disappeared rep c. 1961) who approach you in department stores and spray you with, say, Xeryus, serve only to deflate the pretensions of the ads. Further, they spray the stuff as though it's mace – another one in the eye for the rape fantasists.

The current Xeryus ad is two-thirds formulaic; the people are the missing bits. Manufacturer Givenchy has chosen to spend on buying time rather than on expensive production. It has hijacked probably the most evocative architectural image of this decade, Ricardo Bofill's and Peter Hodgkinson's monolithic neo-classical flats just east of Paris, and traduced it with a tripartite sauce of speeding cirrus clouds, dissonant choir and husky male voices. The least offensive aspect of the thing is that they render the buildings as a stage set; this is the fate of all notable structures from the Sphinx to Big Ben.

But what Xeryus has done by conjoining it with a particular

sort of vocal music and a particular sort of speech is to invest it with the properties that *Triumph Of The Will* lends to the architecture of Paul Troost and of Speer. The idea that 'heroic' fascism (or indeed any other -ism) can sell scent or soap is resistible, but these boys know their markets, don't they?

To the English eye names such as Xeryus and Ysatis present a problem. Once the ear has heard the all-purpose husky Continental pronounce them as Serious and Ease-at-tease things go swingingly. They get these names because they are not just for the British market. Fragrance is, 'ow you say, an eenernation-al lanvitche'. The image is constructed in the country of origin, the voice added according to audience. So maybe the Ysatis voice-over in Spain comes out with a phrase less meretricious than 'I was looking for an encounter'.

This is only marginally less subtle than Opium's 'Never has a perfume provoked such emotion' which phrase is, admittedly, neutral until allied with a neatly didactic film about what smartly dressed women should do with tattooed yobs they've picked up on building sites – they should coax them into positions of sexual submission.

So it proceeds, the litany of come-ons: Mandate is 'worn by men loved by women/worn by men, loved by women'; Old Spice is 'the mark of a man'; Obsession hits bathetic heights with 'she was a fever from which I'll never recover . . . in the kingdom of passion the ruler is obsession.' So it proceeds with the usual promise of getting laid.

As Kingsley Amis's old line 'It Gets You Pissed' would, if adopted, end beer advertisements, 'Gets You Laid' would probably have a similar effect for fragrance.

The thing to remember is that the ad is to be directed at the (male) donor of the gift-wrapped, designer-bottled aphrodisiac; these advertisements are all directed at men. Were they aimed at women they might be rather more varied: they might even have to find metaphors for the different smells. Advertising would have to employ synaesthesia.

1986

Tins Of Shit: How To Flog Dog Food

Dog owners are subs, inadequates, underachieving bullies. You've seen the stunted, bloated, pallid army of the potato fed, the army whose weapons are ambulatory ones. It is not by chance that such publications as *Our Dogs, Dogs Monthly* and *Dog World* are to be found on newsagents' shelves immediately beside *Gung Ho* and *Guns and Ammo*: corner shop Patels know all too well in lieu of what these pavement tyrants have dogs – though were handguns licensed they'd of course deploy them *as well* as their dogs. Meanwhile for rottweiler read Colt, for alsatian Smith and Wesson, for great dane Walther, for dobermann some particularly lethal cross bow already available under plain wrapper.

They're versatile instruments of self assertion, dogs. They bite bits out of adults' legs and children's heads; they menace anyone with their bark and growl; they move at speed through public places. Best of all they dump their excrement everywhere. You wretched subs can't go out on the street and shit, but your dogs can, and they do, don't they, everywhere, with promiscuous abandon, and the beauty of it is that this is the bit that's really nasty – these faeces can blind a child. Look at a rottweiler, look at its ostentatious convex anus, it tells you that this is simply a machine for turning Pal or Chum or Beta Brutus into a coiled cloacal mass. Of course rottweilers are good for biting and all purpose aggravation as well, otherwise they could be dispensed with and the sub could merely buy a can of Pal, open it in the street and dump it quivering in its marrowbone jelly on the pavement, thus achieving a brown coil of unusually great circumference for the world to step in. The manufacturers of Chum, Pedigree

Mowbray (whose factory I was once directed to by a local wag of whom I enquired the way to the best pie shop in that pie town), are the part-sponsors of something called a Poop Scoop Project. In an act of hypocritical beneficence, analogous with those of tobacco firms who sponsor lung cancer research, they have given almost half a million plastic trowels to councils tardily worried about the filth dogs leave behind them. The very name of the project, euphemistically cute, mitigates the nastiness and scope of the faecal menace; doggiewoggie wanna go poopywoopy dud oo didums. No one should be conned by Messrs Chum's apparent philanthropy.

Chum flogs itself with devices that reveal that it knows all too well what bits to aim for. The advertisements appeal to the covert, unadmitted knowledge that the dog is a weapon and to the jolly, cretinous, British capacity for anthropomorphism. Chum refers to its 'breeder service', whatever that is, as 'a friend of a friend' – the second friend being a golden retriever over whose head there hangs a hand in a position of benediction. This guff about man's best friend *is* guff. Outside the work of Jack London it is only emotional cripples who enjoy friendships with dogs; and this 'friendship' is *bought* – by the provision of food: Chum, say. Bribe your dog with our meat, otherwise he'll turn on you, bite *your* limbs, shit on *your* doorstep. Man's best friend is ever a tin of Chum away from being his best enemy. Friend into weapon in one easy step of omission.

The duality, the likelihood of the beast's mutation from one state to the other, is more explicit, more threatening in Winalot's current telly campaign. It shows, in a scene realized by computer cartoons, that if you fill a dog bowl with nuts and bolts you're going to get a dog that's robotic, a quadruped Ned Kelly, a machine. (That it should resemble the animatronic creature Archie in *Lion* comic in the late 50s merely signals the designer's age.) Fill the bowl with Winalot and you get a golden retriever (evidently reckoned desirable, this back-of-Volvo breed). The machine would of course turn on its master, it's an own goal of a dog. Winalot's is a clever little film because its gag about this fear doesn't for a second

diminish the fear. And though it scotches the idea of the Winalot eater as weapon, it has implanted that idea and that image. So you, the sub, are left with the vestigial notion that Winalot is associable, by the fact of its proximity, with biting out baby's throat – someone else's baby, mind: all these ads are predicated on the hand (and family) that feeds not being bit. The endorsement of dog-faced people called 'top breeders', the promise of prolonged active life (i.e., goes on biting and dumping on pavements when long in the tooth), the shots of bounding beasts – all these emphasize performance, belligerent potential, toughness. There's a correspondence here with the associational gamut used to shift petrol, the fuel for another sort of closet weapon.

But advertisements for other products and services which use dogs ignore what is clearly their true appeal to their owners and don't even acknowledge it in a 'coded' fashion. The canine vigilante angle is nowhere to be found in, for instance, the half-witted anthropomorphism of British Telecom's crass tableaux of animals speaking to each other on the phone – if a monopoly must advertise, and that surely is moot, then it might at least do so with some style. And the ad with the dog that 'talks' and proselytizes on behalf of 'real fires' (the things in grates, not pyromaniacs' delights) again exploits conformist, soft-old-pooch, canine lore. There is, then, a stereotypical dog-food dog (harsh, glossy, loyal on condition it's fed right, hardly dissembling its brutality and excremental capacity) and there is a stereotypical loo-paper/telephone/family goods dog. There is virtually no affinity between the two. The stereotype that is closer to actuality is the former; the latter has something to do with the animals in Alison Uttley, with the tradition of bowdlerized, sanitized fairy tale. Proper fairy tales are stuffed with bad animals that eat humans: wily, deceitful animals that dissemble their savagery. It is to humans wittingly colluding with animals of just these qualities that Pal, Chum, Winalot and the rest have so deftly pitched their spiel.

1986

I Like Maps

On the wall in front of me is pinned the *Geographia A–Z Premier Street Plan of Portsmouth*, 3½ inches to the mile, white and ice blue, blobbed with sage green, snaked with orange and cobalt. There are no hachures, no contour lines, there is nothing to indicate the brutality of Portsdown Hill's escarpment which is elemental to the drama of the site – though up there in RB28 and adjoining squares is the narrow proof of Portsmouth's uniqueness, the blue channel (actually it's the colour of rat fur) which shows that the city is on what is, strictly speaking, an island. And down here in AC39 where ice blue and white meet divided by the thinnest black line, here close by the italicized sans serif M of Mean, is where the voys do that terrible thing to the dolphin.

I have had this map (which is, as I suggest, pretty low on info) gaping at me every day for the last year for a specific reason. It is a crutch. I am presently writing a book called *Pompey* and though my Portsmouth is not your Portsmouth I have a scrupulous if bendable attachment to the topographies that both cities – my imagined one, your concrete one – happen to share. I don't 'know' the city, though it's with me always now. Why I should prop up an imaginary construct with so literal a model of the real as a workaday road map sometimes foxes me. Oh, there is I suppose the question of not wanting to make factual errors – but on the other hand since I change names, amend the appearances of buildings, muck around with tides and so on the fact factor is presumably not paramount. I believe that my dependence on this map is prompted by a contrary function, a more fundamental one that all maps fulfil and which we ignore or fail to recognize or

are loath to own to. Two sentences back I used the epithet 'model of the real'; well, a map is indisputably that but it is more than that to a certain cast of mind. It is more even than a confirmation of the real. It is the *sine qua non* of the real. If it's not mapped it's not there. (And if it's not there I can't re-invent it.) The covert, non-utile, function of the map is to order and encode what is actually very messy, to make a dictionary of the land, to mediate between man and the physical world, to give shape to the strange. One might say that all this is familiar, that I am merely listing the functions of art, especially literary art. But no art is so uneffacing, so modestly uninterpretative. Musical notation is equally codified but it is a despatch from composer to performer, a score is necessarily incomplete without the lungs, the wood, the guts that enliven it. Maps can't simply be made earth and clay and water and tree at the drop of a baton, they have their own potent reality which is parallel to that of what they show. Forget *map of*, consider map, *tout court*. I am convinced that when we (by which I mean I) 'read' a map we do not automatically translate signifier into signified, the black circle with a cross dumped on the northernmost point of its circumference does not automatically conjure a picture of a spired church 'or chapel' (as the OS adds in an access of denominational democracy); we do not even picture the primary colours and happy smiling kiddies' faces on a caravan site when we see the miniature magenta van that occurs on OS Tourist Maps – though it must be admitted that such symbols, easy to read and tripper-friendly, rather mitigate the *pureness* of a map's reality; a sailing boat which looks like a diagrammatic sailing boat has the unhappy effect of rendering its bit of estuary or Solent *perspectival*. Just as William Morris abhorred illusionism in wallpaper so do I fear the increasing three-dimensionalism of OS products whose *reductio ad absurdum* would be maps that are no more than doctored aerial photographs. This creeping 'naturalism' is predicated on the notion that we try to 'see' this wood (coniferous) or that spoil heap, a notion which is, as I say, dubious; further, this naturalism will eventually render maps unequivocally utile, props of the

leisure industry that are shorn of their secret life. If you don't believe me just look at the promotional, quasi-Tourist Board stuff inside the cover of the most modern OS maps: pics of campers and trailers, of rucksacked survivalists, hype about 'maximum enjoyment', 'pleasure', 'exceptionally easy reading' and so on. Nothing about the rigours of abstraction, about studied concentration, about the exercise of imagination. But I suppose as usual that 'society' is to blame: that's what everyone else always says and I dare surmise that cartographers are no exception. Certainly today's literal-mindedness would not countenance the most aesthetically delightful and ingenious piece of British map making this century, H C Beck's diagrammatic rendering of the London underground, were it to appear for the first time now.

Its sophisticated conventionalization and its 'lies' – look, for instance, at the way it places Bayswater station to the 'north' of Notting Hill Gate station – demand an audience which is unused to being told where to find official beauty spots, where to windsurf, where to eat its sandwiches and which is apparently incapable of determining a slope for itself. Address complaints to grid reference SU388148.

1987

Exchange & Mart: A Nation's Pulse

Style is a word that should be packaged with inverted commas about it. They need to be there to signal its user's knowingness and ironic sense and detachment from the salad of ideas – a pretty tired salad, actually – which it brings to mind. Style is a handle that presently promises guff on the meaning of tab collars. It promises guff from the heart on the probity of the Boilerhouse Project's exhibition policy. It promises craven salutes to ephemera – you know, the mini skirt is a symptom of economic recession or of economic boom or whatever. It promises, too, lots of labels: 'Post punk' – which may be applied to anything from dystopian villain hairdos to visceral novels to inarticulate 'philosophy' (another word that demands quotes). 'Trash aesthetic' – which may be applied to anything from dystopian villain hairdos to, you name it . . . market stall analogue quartz watches, programmes of monosyllabic thought, three button shirts with the wrong sort of reptile crawling across the left pectoral. 'Early Bowie' is an epithet for noise and lurex. 'Late Brian Jones' often occurs in solemn discussion of swimming pool design.

What we are on about here is, evidently, style as it is understood by that curious modern beast, the 'style writer'. You have read Peter York, you have read Loyd Grossman, you have read Robert Elms. These are men who know that Crolla is not a word in the nosology, that it isn't a nasty infectious rash you bring back from a holiday where you paid insufficient attention to the water supply or to the type of sexual partner at the optional sangria 'n' goat-burger bar-b-q. These guys will tell you the difference between 'modern' and 'moderne' – the former refers to the stuff wrought by the heavyweights like

Mies and Le Corbusier. 'Moderne' means what was done in popular imitation of them – streamlining and *Daily Mail* windows in Stanmore and Art Drecko statuary. These guys will tell you why a Windsor collar is OK and why a Windsor knot is not; I guess it must have something to do with the Windsor knot's having been popularized by David who became Edward who became Hitler's chum, the Duke of Windsor. Style writers' stock in trade is classification. They might be mycologists breaking down the genus amanita into species and sub species, reporting exciting new finds, giving these new finds new names. They can classify our great post-modern world according to such a plenitude of types that you have to wonder if there are not more types than there are individuals – one day every individual will have his own sub specification, his own label. You could even invent a word for this label. You could call it a *name*.

Now it goes without saying that those milieus which style writers believe deserve their scrutiny are the ones whose denizens more or less self-consciously adopt a tribal badge. The badge might be a particular slang vocabulary, a particular scarf, a particular conjunction of Go Faster stripe and chrome exhaust. It might be a very special way with your keys on your Levis. It might be a haircut, it might be a magazine. The magazines are bibles as well as badges: *Harper's and Queen*; *Country Life* for devotees of architectural pornography – all the houses you can lust over but never have; *Custom Car*; *Ritz*; *The Face*; the *Spectator* if you're twenty five going on sixty and yearn for your own man to help you dress right. I could go on. Each of these magazines is associable with a particular group or clutch of groups whose aspirations they at least partially represent – the adverts are the giveaway, save of course in the case of the *Spectator* which doesn't have any, quite fittingly. These and countless other periodicals cater for the sectional interests of, say, 1% of the people of these islands. In a smallish way they are a gauge of this or that scrap of population. None of them, though, tells us much about that curious fellow, the Ordinary Working Man, whose very ordinariness may be measured in units called Tonibens. The OWM

may, of course be a victim of the post-literate – i.e. electively illiterate – society. He may, God forbid, be so bereft of 'style' that no magazine, however tacky, can hold a mirror to him. I'm afraid that fine publications like the *Sun* and the *Star* don't do the business. Whatever their faults they are still newspapers, to be believed at will.

There is however a magazine which tells us a lot about the OWM's class-treacherous brother, the TB (i.e. Tebbit's Bloke – *his* ordinariness may be measured in units called Norms). The psalter of self-improvement I'm referring to is of course *Exchange & Mart*. This hebdomadary marvel may be taken, quite seriously really, as the Pulse of the Silent Hangers (POSH, if you must have another acronym.) TBs vote honestly, in their own interest, and can thus hang parliament – they float. TBs want to hang on in there and do their own thing – as, actually, they would say, though their children wouldn't dream of using such an expression. TBs may or may not pine for the return of capital punishment; given that acquisition and possession play such vital parts in their lives, they probably do pine for it.

Exchange & Mart is not only about them. It is *by* them. It is probably the only collective enterprise to which the TB subscribes and it manages to mitigate the ignominy of collectivity by its emphatically recurrent individualism. It is like tens of thousands of voices shouting messages to one another. The messages are marvellously disparate and have just one thing in common – they are bricks in the wall of many base utopias. Not, mark, your ideal society. The emphasis on burglar alarms and cut price barbed wire and replica pistols and crossbows make it clear that the TB has no time for notions of human perfectibility. No, these utopias are trad pragmatic English. Home as castle and all that, plus crocks of gold to be got through small business wheezes. One has to come clean – *Exchange & Mart* is also the *Das Kapital* of the Black Economy, but that's OK: we all secretly admire Tels on the make who take cash only.

The issue of *Exchange & Mart* I have here tells me more than I need to know about the TB. It could, of course, be *any* issue

of *Exchange & Mart*. One of the points about the magazine is its immutability. Crazes may come and crazes may go but they do not alter the thing's essence. The TB may even subscribe to crazes – they represent profit-opportunities so far as he's concerned and he has the faith in techno-gimmickry that has been the hallmark of the Conservatives ever since the agricultural industrialist Peter Walker decided to give new and better names to the counties a decade ago. Here's a TB at home. He comes yomping towards the house along the York-flagged path dressed like a member of 4 Para. He's been in the cedar-shingle shed with the chainsaw and the shrine to his father's bike and the books on astral projection and the portable generator and the boxes of toupees from Manila bought at genuine knockdown slashed prices for effortless resale. And he's admiring the lawn he unrolled last week and he's wondering whether to break into the instantly rewarded world of carpet cleaning or into the world of pop music (a box number in Beckenham will tell him how). *Or* – he could make 1,000 % profit selling manuals by post, or build a one man jet helicopter (easy inexpensive construction plans for £1.99 from an industrial estate in Herefordshire). He passes the lions, heraldic beasts, rustic figures and Dutch windmill that he moulded himself (bargain packed catalogue from St Leonards on Sea) and fights his way through a forest of locks – send £5.50 to Bournemouth and you'll learn to make your own. Now he's in the lounge where she's waiting to drive him wild, excite him and delight him in sexciting nylon lace – addresses everywhere, but most notably in cheeky sizzling Lancashire. In the bathroom the tongues of geckos and monitors seek adult locusts, 10 for £1 for tiffin. In the bath itself a Royal Python bulges with a just munched baby rabbit – 'Raising Hyline rabbits can be a profitable source of supplementary extra income.' There are as many conversation pieces in this house as in a fence's den. But what the place still lacks is a simulated life-size tiger. No problem, there's one for sale in Hendon, London N3. 'It's potentially a real tiger, old man,' is what Mr Fisher of Hendon, London N3 told me on the phone. 'It's very easy to clean and maintain . . . No, I'm not divulging

how it works but when you come into the room it growls and scrapes the floor with its claws . . . It is potentially a real tiger.'

The damage was going to be £1,500 – which may not be much for a potentially real tiger, but is an awful lot of wonga to shell out to become a TB. The TB can of course afford this sort of thing. He's got the money because he did get on his bike, he did graft. He's got everything because he really worked for it. What he hasn't got is his laureate. He belongs to a sizeable group of British society that – awful lack – doesn't have a style writer studying it. There is no pop sociologist on the horizon eager to give him a place in the new mythology alongside the Sloanes and the Skins and the Gentlemen Hacks. Now, this isn't a post – this laureateship – that I'll be applying for. But – any of you guys listening – I offer you these notes quite free. Well, I offer you them free in a TB's sort of way. You know that nothing is free when it comes down to it. When I say free I'm saying that I'd like to see a drink. You know what I mean.

1985

Monsieur Tissot Gets His

Tissot's Portsmouth Dockyard measures 1 foot 9½ inches by 1 foot 3 inches. The reproduction I have in front of me is 7½ by 5 inches. In the background you can see the wooden cupola of what was still – it was painted in 1877, and depicts a contemporary scene – the church of St Thomas, what is now St Thomas's Cathedral, and has been since 1927. To the left and slightly forward of that cupola is another, that of Number 10 Store in the Dockyard – this has been transformed in a different way, it was bombed out of existence late in 1940. In the foreground sit three people, two young women and between them a sergeant of a Scottish regiment in dress uniform – busby, tartan stockings with tabs like those affected by boy scouts or the Leeds United team under Revie, and white button boots. He is all braggadocio and leers; he is flirting with the woman on his right, a coquette got up in black and white. The woman on his left, who dissembles her hurt at his neglect, wears a shawl of the same red tartan as his stockings, a sign no doubt of their bond. The three of them are in the bows of a rowing boat and are viewed, rather unsatisfactorily, from the place where one of the oarsmen should be – there is, if you like, a void of convenience that lets in the spectator. The boat they're in is heading for a point between two ships whose colour schemes parrot those of the women's clothes – one ship is black and white, one is red and white. This chromatic device is only slightly arch, it's not as arch as showing the neglected woman sitting with an unfurled umbrella, as if expecting the worst, and showing the black and white coquette with her umbrella down, indicating *her* expectation of fine things to come. I'm not sure what part another

row-boat plays, the one which is heading in from the right and which is truncated by the picture's margin – it's probably a mitigating passage of naturalism. Tissot was endlessly fond of such photographic tricks, things protruding from outside the frame to assure us that there is a world beyond the painting, glimpses that are designed to tantalize but which seem meagrely un-painterly. This is half hearted illusionism. It's the stuff of illustration rather than of painting.

I've listed the contents of the painting in such detail because there is nothing else to it. I've mentioned the disparity between the size of the painting and its reproduction because size makes no difference – the subject is all. It is *untransformed*, it is untouched by anything like imagination, by a particular manner of representation, by the sorts of mark that might usually be lost in reproduction. There is a consummate surface technique, and that is all. It has, as I say, more to do with the craft of illustration than with the art of painting – and the trick with craft is always to repeat yourself, while with art it is never to repeat yourself. That of course is an ideal, a counsel of perfection, neither is often achieved – but Tissot comes as close as any artist to being a perfect craftsman. Everything is perfectly realized, nothing is felt. His pictures are crowded with minutiae and quite quite empty. The myriad parts add up to, well, not quite nothing. They are costume dramas, art – directed out of sight, all costume and no drama. Costume drama usually connotes of course a past epoch; Tissot applied the quasi-archaeological scrutiny of the literal minded stage or film designer to the dress of his own day – with the bizarre, time-twisting result that his paintings now look for all the world as though they have just been painted. And this is where their appeal lies. This is why we like them. They are so marvellously vacuous, so thoroughly correspondent to the sorts of scene that we see on the telly or at the films, that they appear to be *of today*. Their retrospective strength is the fact that, for all their subject matter, they are about nothing more than well dressed gestures. They are *unthreatening*, they allow us to indulge in the laziest of conceits – that of judging a former age by our own standards, that of ascribing to that age

our own values. Tissot makes the past palatable – we do not have to make that leap, that shimmy through the mirror which past *art* demands if we are to revel in it. No, he is neat, decorative, easy, and – somehow or other – our contemporary. Tissot holds this position not merely by being the laureate of sartor triumphant. He managed, besides – and it must be a fluke that he managed it – to deal in nothing but clichés and types. This is what I'm talking about when I say that he is not threatening: his currency is absolutely familiar. His work is a distillation of all the notions that have come down to us about the upper and upper middle classes of metropolitan High Victorian England; and even when he moved outside his own period, as in, say, a painting like *A Luncheon* where the two lovers are dressed in the style of about 1795, he invests the thing with a whole gamut of accepted notions of Directoire society – lubriciousness, wantonness, carnal venality. Just how the collective conscious gleans its idea of an era or a place or a milieu is of course a splendid mystery. This or that perception of a past time is part of the whole regrettable idea of the zeitgeist, a rather important part actually – and some rather good artists have had their work posthumously mitigated – sometimes not posthumously, sometimes it happens while they're still kicking – mitigated, anyway, as *the embodiment of their age*. You know, Scott Fitzgerald and all that – you can even get angry on the poor son of a bitch's behalf. With Tissot it's different, the man's raison d'être might have been to have made brightly coloured tableaux of what we unthinkably concur is the spirit of his time. If you gave an illustrator of today who had the same technical facility as Tissot – and there are quite a few – a brief to produce work depicting high society in the 1870s, if you gave him visual references like fashion magazines and architectural journals and books of ships he'd come up with something terribly close to Tissot's. However much Tissot may have been part of the society that his work always shows it is shown from the outside, coolly, with a distancing objectivity. He never actually *says* anything about the milieu he knew so well. This may of course be because he was a foreigner, but I wonder.

Tissot came to England to live in the early 70s because his position in Paris was rather compromised by his expedient involvement with the Paris Commune. He was a social hit, though he became increasingly reclusive after knowledge of his liaison with a divorcee became public – the Victorians didn't value such affairs too highly. His lover, Kathleen Newton, appears in many of his English paintings – I think she may be the coquette in *Portsmouth Dockyard*. When she died of TB in 1882 he returned to Paris and became increasingly religiose. His house in Grove End Road was taken over by Alma Tadema – the blue plaque outside it mentions this painter, not Tissot. I'd like to know what became of Mrs Newton's two children and of *their* children. We do know what became of the child of another French painter, a younger contemporary of Tissot who also fled to England after the fall of the Paris Commune, Guillaume Desdemesnes-Hugon, who like Tissot anglicized his name, becoming William. It is perhaps instructive to compare the careers of James Tissot and William Desdemesnes-Hugon.

Desdemesnes-Hugon had no reputation as a painter when he arrived in England in 1871. Tissot was already established in Paris, but Desdemesnes-Hugon, twelve years younger and only twenty three when he arrived here had had no chance to make a name for himself. And his temperament, rather than his talent militated against him in London. He worked as an illustrator for undistinguished publications and led a life of versatile concupiscence. He frequented Cremorne Gardens, by the 70s a place of poor repute and moral squalor. From here, apparently, in the summer of 1875, just two years before the gardens were closed for ever, he took one of the popular balloon rides. There was a gale, the balloon was blown high across London and eventually put down in the Lee Valley near Tottenham. The river was khaki, the field was wet, the sky was the colour of nicotine. Desdemesnes-Hugon got drunk at a public house and went back with a barmaid, Ivy Rolls, to her lodgings at Walthamstow. A child was conceived. He seems to have been callous, or at least indifferent towards the girl's predicament. She didn't have what we quaintly call the

right to choose. A boy was born. Desdemesnes-Hugon's erratic behaviour cost him jobs and commissions. He retreated, as many have done before and since, to the country, to a variety of agrarian and utopian communes whose life he recorded with fidelity and fondness. He was at Hordle in the New Forest where the followers of the self proclaimed divine Mary Ann Girling wore white uniform on Sundays and danced with such fervour when moved by the spirit of the Lord that they got the name of Shakers. He was an associate of the homosexual proselytizer, mystic and sandal-maker Edward Carpenter. He painted at the Tolstoyan community at Whiteway in the Cotswolds. He knew Yeats, Kropotkin, Arnold Toynbee. He professed vegetarianism. He preached land reform. He never married. In 1903 he moved to Letchworth, the first garden city and a magnet for those who had lived lives like his. It was here that Desdemesnes-Hugon's son found his father. He had apparently sought his father for a decade. How he found him is unrecorded. He did not reveal his identity when he went to lodge with the painter at his tiny house by Norton Common. Desdemesnes-Hugon used often now to travel to London to sell his paintings – he was vaguely associated with the New English Art Club and was championed by, inter alia, Spencer Gore and Harold Gillman. Letchworth then was a very muddy utopia. Passengers on the trains to King's Cross were required to change their very muddy boots before they embarked, and to leave them at the station. One aching cold late afternoon when he arrived back from London Desdemesnes-Hugon found to his dismay that his boots had been taken from the station; the sky was the colour of nicotine, the ground was soaking. The painter walked home in his light city shoes and died of a chill ten days later, pneumonia had set in. It is recorded that after his funeral – an orgy of non-alcoholic beverages and folk-dance – his boots were found beneath the bed of the man who was his son. A sort of revenge had been taken. Desdemesnes-Hugon is largely forgotten today. His work is less flashy than Tissot's, but it is by no means maladroit; it will never be known in the way that Tissot's is. It is his misfortune that the life he led and portrayed is not part

of the deposit that resides in the popular imagination. His work does not flatter us, reinforce our prejudices, because it represents a vanished world about which we harbour no prejudices. We don't know about it. Tissot, on the other hand, will run and run – he never strays from what is familiar to us all, even if, when you come to think about it, it may be familiar just because of him.

1985

I'm Glad I'm Not Married To David Bailey

A 1963 photograph by Bert Stern shows a young man, grinning, nearly supine, with a big buckled belt and Anello and Davide boots (centre seam, Cuban heel, elastic gussets) pretending to snap the monumental model standing over him. Three years later Stern gives us a set-up that includes a model, a tripod, studio scaffolding and a mirror that reflects his directorial hands, a chunk of his face and his camera. At this distance they appear as cartoons of that gravely frivolous era when fashion photographers hit the top of the heap and fuelled the fame that was cast upon them (*Blow Up*, early colour magazines) with easy essays in self-aggrandizement and self-glamorizing hype, as it wasn't then called. The model in the second photograph is Twiggy, whom the whole world knew as now it knows, signally, only Samantha Fox. And the young man with the camera in '63 is, of course, David Bailey who, though his choice of fashion photographs for the V&A discreetly excludes his own work, is present in more than just this one faintly undignified image: his heterogeneous precursors and necessarily less catholic apes have their day; sometimes it's like looking at a vast portfolio of one man's stuff; the fact of the show's being one man's selection (untempered by exigencies of 'objectivity') gives it links and bonds that might be otherwise imperceptible. It's the story of a taste, the biography of a sensibility. It is neither a history of fashion nor of fashion photography: the new look gets short shrift, short shifts get looked at but not up – that curious, broken colt pose (knees together, ankles splayed) which was ubiquitous in the mid-sixties probably originated as an act of modesty. If you're

wearing a microskirt and have a lubricious, classless photographer leering at you there's not a lot you can do about it. His leer becomes the eyes of millions. Fashion photography, this collection makes clear, is not concerned with flogging schmutter and moving threads. 'A chimpanzee can do that.' Rather, it is concerned, according to Bailey, with 'great photographers almost inventing their own women'. We are thus invited to consider Cecil Beaton's invention and William Klein's and Richard Avedon's – further, we are invited to consider Beaton's *woman*, a creature in the collective singular, and Klein's, bla-bla-bla. Just like the Rubens dox, and the Gauguin bit, and the Botticelli bint. Bailey's idea – though he's modest enough to leave me to articulate it – is that the female archetypes 'invented' by these 'great' photographers are associable with those of the great painters. It is not the fact that a photograph is made in a heartbeat and a painting in a while longer that renders this analogy moot, nor the notion that photography is 'inferior' to painting – it's different, that's all; no, what promotes doubt about the probity of this correspondence is the specific choice of photographs, not the vague old canard about the 'worth' of photography and that. The specific choice has the air of a stack of carcasses from which a chef has cut the meat to make his dish, they are the objects of that butchery called influence or, less happily, plagiarism – its importance is, as I say, that in it may be determined a sort of precursive pattern. Well, the trouble is that masters of a particular art (no matter how major or how slight) are often more excited by the quirky, the whimsical, the meretricious, the frankly second-rate than they are by previous masters – they are a more fruitful source to draw on. And while Messrs Beaton, Klein, Avedon and so on are patently reckoned to be first-rate photographers they are not thus shown here; at best they come through as oddballs, at worst as the sort of eyes-without-brains that nowadays make pop videos. One looks in vain for the sheer intelligence and rigorous vision that the best photographers (Diane Arbus) always displayed; she incidentally, unsurprisingly, provides the only image here to create any sort of disquiet – a girl child dressed in a nylon party frock

(which is iffy because of its kinship to mail-order 'funwear') and standing like a lewd and unknowing martyr to paedophiliac lubricity in a dingy garden. It is the lack of this kind of emotional charge in the collection that is disappointing. Of course there is stuff that connects because of its crassness (model with urchins in urban slum), because of its banal exoticism (beaches, palms, liners, chauffeurs who've done nightschool in S&M), because of its photo-Darwinism (Aryan girl in gleaming white jodhpurs marches across desert while her child is carried by black skiv). This is all kitsch, and Bailey knows it; I *think* he knows it. And when it's not kitsch it's often rather limp. The vaunted inventions of the despicably snobbish Beaton are asexual fag-hags – 'walkers' with *impeccable* taste; Hans Feurer's women teeter on the pornographic not because they're dressed in rubber but because they're posed like bad sculptures, as though Herr Feurer believes that art is achieved through mannerism rather than thought; Helmut Newton's massive humourlessness is represented by the silliest shot on show, two girls in evening dress, in daylight, in a bush, in flagrante delicto, with a posse of mounted policemen (zut! – those uniforms) looking on. This stuff exists in voids where 'style' is all – style, the wonderful union of thought and expression that requires no mitigating inverted commas, is not on show; style exists where there are limits to the strenuously conceived reality that is created or represented. 'Style' is a gratuitous sauce applied to the dismally commonplace, it's the gift wrapping round nothingness. As for Bailey himself, the cannibalistic ghost who's present but unseen, the thing is that what with other photographers are no more than poses and stunts are, with him, *attitudes*. This may cause one to wonder at his state of mind but it never fosters doubt about the conviction and energy of his work. You know the guy means it, that this really is his angle on women, this bandaged look which exploits burns patients. Thank God, as Archie Rice put it, I'm normal and that I'll never be married to him.

1986

Jane Gatz Writes

Our adolescent litanies rarely reveal us. I had friends who knew the names of all the salmon flies, of Fitzgerald's heroines, of their colt's sire's cousins. Me, I had by heart these names: Mdivani, Reventlow, Cary Grant, Troubetzkoy, Rubirosa, von Cramm – Barbara Hutton's husbands. That must seem precociously anticipative. It's certainly unusual – do you believe that they, those dorm-chums, have spent *their* adult lives on the Test or submitting to the suits of lost loves or breeding horse-flesh? No, they were in thrall to whims and crushes and crazes. My madness was different; it wasn't willed; its objects weren't plucked from the air. This was the madness I was born to, it was as inevitable as my retinal pigment ('amber touched by garnet' was what one importunate creepo called it, but by then I had learnt that such facile flash was a certain mark of the greedy and replied, matter of fact, 'the colour is mud grey, like rat fur'.) I don't mean my madness was genetic, but it *was* inherited – it came with the name. My patronym is like an inoperable humpback, it makes me an anomaly, it draws people to me just the way a sideshow freak with a terrible malformation draws people to him – they want to stroke his hump, yet they want to avert their eyes: it sets up a potent charge, that civil war of desire and repulsion. Sometimes I feel like a cobra.

I know when I realized that my norm was not *the* norm, that my life was not like yours. It was when I was ten; I already realized we had more of everything – houses, horses, cars, paintings, fridges, trees, wine, gravel, chairs, farms, water, bibelots, books, chandeliers, boats, topiary, clothes, carpets, peacocks, grass, silver, cows, statues, churches, taps,

gilding. Of course a quantitative difference, if it is great enough, becomes a qualitative difference, but I didn't know that then. What it was that made it clear to me that we belonged in a strange and rare state was my father's thirty-fifth birthday – not, mark, the meat and music and jewels and drink and flowers, but the way he duped the weather, spat in the face of nature, wouldn't let it beat him. From nowhere at four hours' notice he conjured 800 pairs of galoshes and a battalion of men in matching capes and sou'westers to hand a pair to everyone as they got out of their cars – it was the first rain in six weeks, and it was monsoon-like, and the field was awash, and there were these men glistening in PVC when the headlights picked them out – they were doing tictac, signalling the cars hither and there, waving torches like clubs; as they ran, splintered gills jumped behind their feet. They were soaked. I was so proud of Dads.

It isn't illusory, the confidence you have that if you do Mogadon, scrumpy, scag, blues, blow and so on, you can come off them. With money you're pharmaceutically blessed; it doesn't make you totally immune to harm, but it helps – only the rich get their blood changed. Having money is having power over your fate in a way that's inconceivable to even the moderately wealthy. It's like being a tyrant, but a tyrant who's always liable to be toppled, the dictator of a banana republic, say. So with absolute power, so with absolute money ... Money of this order and power are more than vague reflections of each other. Money grants you power in a limited milieu and that tiny taste can make you crave more, in a bigger arena; I quite understand the *fantasy* of exercising the will, issuing *ukases*, enjoying the right to change your mind as you want. It's intoxicating.

You think you might as well take a chance because you can always buy your way out – out of drugs, out of men. No matter what emotional hold you're pinned down by you retain – *I* retain – this conviction that if you break it you won't be doing yourself any ill, that in fact you'll be fine. It makes you impervious to hurt. It certainly makes you impervious to the jerks who buzz round you. Toy with them, yes; get hooked, no – not

that they're much temptation. I believe that I always have the upper hand, over everything and everyone – that's what money and name give me. The idea that some Hispanic who has learnt to open a door for me could actually prey on me is risible. Oh, he might think that it's that way round but I can assure you it isn't, whatever it may *look* like, no matter how it's presented to the world – the rich girl as victim is a stereotype I don't conform to. Indeed I know no one who conforms to it. Like all stereotypes it lodges in the public mind because of laziness and ignorance and incuriosity; it's the product of assumption, not of observation. Polygamy, promiscuity, junk – these may be the facts of a life, but facts aren't the truth. The truth is that just because you are touched – OK, *sullied*, by these things you are by no means necessarily a victim. The gossip hacks are uniformly middle-class and dissemble their massive envy by trying to assimilate; they portray us as victims because that's a way of showing that we suffer some kind of disadvantage. They're peddling a back-handed egalitarianism.

When I was seventeen I was photographed for an article in a now dead magazine – it was called *Brand-name Beauties*; there were five of us and you could drink us, wear us, drive us and so on. Dads was livid and said it would put me in the sights of every fortune-hunter in the realm. Well, they knew about me already, though Dads can't have been aware of that. Money isn't just something you own. It marks you and makes you and thus gives you a quality independent of itself, and obviously this quality may attract a certain sort of man, mostly gamblers, those shiftless men who export pork to Israel and call it King Rabbit, that sort of thing. There are many easier ways of getting money than chasing girls who have it and I believe it's money's *aura* that draws these guys. They're fascinated, yet they mistrust their fascination, they are as unwilling as I am to commit themselves. And when a man doesn't know me and learns my name his heart shifts gear, all his impressions of me are crushed by the weight of association, 'image', the power of unseen glamour. That's what the aura is – an invisible glamour.

1986

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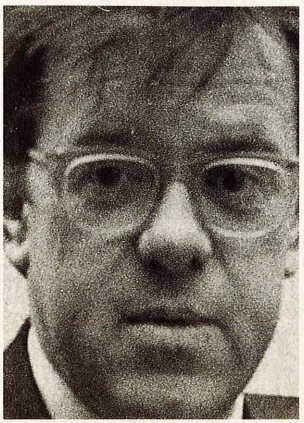

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